



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**U.S. AND RUSSIAN STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES OF  
IRAN: DIFFERENT VIEWS OF NUCLEAR  
PROLIFERATION**

by

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March 2006

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**U.S. AND RUSSIAN STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES OF IRAN: DIFFERENT  
VIEWS OF NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Do Russia and the United States share the same views of nuclear proliferation? This thesis seeks to answer this question by considering the case of Iran. Both nations are concerned about the spread of nuclear weapons, yet have taken opposing stances on Iran's nuclear program. The United States contends that Iran is using its civilian nuclear program to build an atomic weapon. Russia, on the other hand, does not publicly acknowledge such a view.

The conclusions of this thesis are that threat perceptions have shaped U.S. and Russian views of nuclear proliferation. Both countries have supported Iran's nuclear program, but their timing coincided with major shifts in Iran's diplomatic orientation. When the Cold War ended, they were left with contrasting threat perceptions of Iran; Russia viewed Iran as a geo-strategic trading partner, while the United States viewed it as a sponsor of international terrorism. More importantly, this thesis highlights how vital it is for members of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to remain united in their effort to curb the spread of nuclear weapons. If IAEA members cannot agree on the risks of proliferation, then the very foundation upon which the nonproliferation regime rests is in danger of obsolescence.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Do the United States and Russia view the issue of nuclear proliferation in the same light? This thesis seeks to answer this question by considering the case of Iran. In the past several years, Iran has taken the media spotlight over international allegations of a concealed nuclear weapons program. Iran has repeatedly denied such allegations and claimed that its nuclear program was strictly for peaceful purposes. In spite of this denial, on February 4, 2006, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors voted “to report its concerns about Iran’s nuclear activities, including Tehran’s failure to comply with its agency safeguards agreement, to the UN Security Council.”<sup>1</sup> The United States had spent months trying to convince Russia and China that Iran’s nuclear ambitions posed a threat to the nonproliferation regime and welcomed this vote as a step toward resolution.<sup>2</sup> While the United States remained convinced that Iran is trying to build a nuclear weapon, Russia is openly less critical of Iran’s nuclear ambitions. These opposing views of Iran’s nuclear intentions placed the UN Security Council in a dilemma on how best to respond. The United States favored economic sanctions and Russia desired increased dialogue and diplomacy.<sup>3</sup> This divergent response leads one to question whether they perceive the same level of threat from Iran.

Why are Russia and the United States seemingly at an impasse with one another regarding nonproliferation and Iranian nuclear ambitions? Both countries claim to have similar views of nuclear nonproliferation,<sup>4</sup> yet differ considerably over Iran’s nuclear

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Kerr, “IAEA Reports Iran to UN Security Council,” *Arms Control Today* 36, no. 2, (March 2006), [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2006\\_03/MARCH-IAEAIran.asp](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2006_03/MARCH-IAEAIran.asp), (March 15, 2006). For a detailed explanation of the IAEA safeguards agreement, see Henry D. Sokolski, “Appendix III: Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,” *Best of Intentions: America’s Campaign Against Strategic Weapons Proliferation* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 131-135.

<sup>2</sup> The Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) requires the IAEA to refer a country to the UN Security Council when it violates its nuclear safeguards agreement. While the IAEA had previously approved a resolution on September 24, 2005, that found Iran “technically” non-compliant with its IAEA safeguards agreement, Russia and China abstained from the vote. For more information see, Paul Kerr, “IAEA Cites Iran on Safeguards Failures,” *Arms Control Today* 35, no. 8 (October 2005), [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2005\\_10/OCT-IAEAIran.asp](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2005_10/OCT-IAEAIran.asp) (November 21, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> RFE/RL, “UN: Security Council Appears Deadlocked Over Iran,” March 14, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/03/76B1AD20-EA73-4168-A3BB-28B2C84E88D0.html>, March 16, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Sergei Karaganov, “Russia and the International Order,” in *Chaillot Paper: What Russia Sees* N74 (January 2005), ed. Dov Lynch (Conde-sur-Norieau, France: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2005), 26.

ambitions. This difference of opinion has led Russia to take a more conciliatory position on Iran at the Security Council, compared to the United States, and raises several important questions. Why does Russia continue to provide nuclear technology and assistance to Iran, despite warnings from the United States and the international community not to do so? Why is the United States so firmly convinced that Iran is trying to build a nuclear weapon and Russia is not? Do the historical relations between the two countries and Iran offer any clues as to why one deems Iran as a regional threat and the other a potential strategic partner? Do Russia and the United States share similar views of nuclear nonproliferation? How have their threat perceptions changed over time, and what impact has this had on their views of proliferation with the Iranian regime?

Ultimately, this thesis finds that U.S. and Russian threat perceptions of Iran have changed over time and affected their views regarding proliferation. Both countries have taken an active role in building Iran's nuclear program, but their timing generally coincided with major shifts in diplomatic orientation and changes in leadership. In 1974, for example, the United States agreed to build nuclear reactors in Iran and provide nuclear fuel to support the Shah's desire for a robust civilian nuclear program, but canceled its support following the Iranian revolution.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, in 1995, the Russians agreed to rebuild the Bushehr nuclear reactor that had been damaged during the Iran-Iraq war,<sup>6</sup> a deal made possible by their rapprochement with Iran in 1989. What explains these shifts in nonproliferation policy towards Iran? During the Cold War, the threat perceptions of U.S. and Soviet leaders towards the Middle East – Iran in particular – were shaped by their efforts to balance East against West.<sup>7</sup> After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran initiated an adversarial non-alignment policy that caused U.S. policy to shift from strictly balancing East against West, to also balancing against Iran. When the Cold War ended, Russia and the United States were left with contrasting threat perceptions of Iran; Russia viewed Iran as a geo-strategic trading partner, while the

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<sup>5</sup> Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Nuclear Overview: Iran," available at, [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/profiles/Iran/1819.html](http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Iran/1819.html), (March 6, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Roger Howard, *Iran In Crisis? Nuclear Ambitions and the American Response* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2004), 96.

<sup>7</sup> Nikki R. Keddie and Mark J. Gasiorowski, eds., *Neither East Nor West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 266.

United States viewed it as an exporter of terrorism and an antagonist to the Middle East Peace Process. These details are traced in the chapters to follow.

The method of analysis for this thesis is a comparative study of the relations of the United States and Russia, each with respect to Iran, from 1953 to 2005. U.S. and Russian threat perceptions, in particular their views of nonproliferation, are compared and contrasted. This thesis evaluates how major cleavages and/or restoration of relations with Iran have altered the threat perceptions and influenced their views on nuclear nonproliferation. Through an empirical examination, this thesis compares and contrasts the events during 1953–1979, 1980–1991, 1992–1999, and 2000–2005. These periods contain significant historical turning points that changed attitudes towards, altered relations with, and affected the views of nonproliferation in the United States and Russia. Although the critical reader may judge these time periods as being rather ambitious, it must be noted that the objective of this research is only to analyze significant events that represent trends—or a significant departure from those trends (as indicated below)—and not to simply to rewrite history.

- The period of 1953–1979 was chosen for three reasons. In 1953, the United States led a coup that restored the Shah to power, ushering in a period of favorable relations and nuclear cooperation between the United States and Iran. In contrast, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 resulted in the United States breaking off relations and terminating nuclear cooperation with Iran, ultimately leading to a period of ill will that has continued until the present. This period also captures Soviet attempts to subvert the Iranian government.

- The period of 1980–1991 was chosen to explore the effect that the Iranian Revolution had on threat perceptions of nuclear proliferation. It also traces the impact of the Iran-Iraq War, Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, and Gulf War. Towards the end of this period, the Soviet Union established friendly relations with Iran and made an historic decision to begin nuclear cooperation with Iran for peaceful purposes. The effects of this decision are taking their toll on diplomatic negotiations at the UN Security Council.

- The period of 1992–1999 was chosen to evaluate whether changes in threat perceptions occurred following the end of the Cold War. It also focuses on the

actions taken by President Boris Yeltsin's administration and looks at the impact that they had on attitudes toward Iran. This time frame is especially important due to the fact that Russia was facing significant domestic challenges and struggling to shape a consistent foreign policy. It also begins an era of significant nuclear cooperation between Russia and Iran, looked upon with condemnation by the United States.

- The period of 2000–2005 was chosen to evaluate the impact that Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President George W. Bush had on shaping foreign policy toward Iran. In addition, it traces the impact that the post–9/11 events had on threat perceptions, and possibly, why the United States became a much more vocal advocate of nuclear nonproliferation.

## **CHAPTER II**

This chapter lays out the theoretical framework of the thesis. It defines nuclear proliferation and describes some opposing views of its dangers. It provides theoretical explanations of threat perceptions: why they are important, where they come from, and what impact they may have on nuclear proliferation. Even more, this chapter emphasizes the importance that threat perceptions have in explaining the seemingly opposing views of nuclear proliferation held by the United States and Russia. Ultimately, it provides the framework for which the empirical analysis will be conducted in chapters III, IV and V.

## **CHAPTER III**

This chapter examines relations between Russia and Iran from 1953 to 2005. In particular, it focuses on the evolution of Russian relations with Iran regarding nuclear, economic, and strategic interests. It also pays close attention to official statements of the Russian government, which may indicate a shift in views and/or threat perceptions of Iran. It focuses on how the actions of the United States may have contributed to a warming of relations between Russia and Iran. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to explain Russia's rationale for continuing to support Iran's nuclear program, and possibly, why Russia, unlike the United States, does not perceive nuclear cooperation with Iran as a threat.



## **CHAPTER IV**

This chapter examines U.S.–Iranian relations from 1953 to 2005. In particular, this chapter focuses on conflicts over economic and strategic interests, as well as nuclear nonproliferation. Special attention is given to pre- and post-1979 views of nuclear nonproliferation, and how improvements in Russian–Iranian relations may have exacerbated U.S. threat perceptions. As in Chapter III, special attention is paid to official government statements regarding U.S. views of the Iranian regime. This chapter ultimately seeks to answer two questions. First, why does the United States believe Iran is trying to build a nuclear weapon when Russia, publicly, does not? Second, why does the United States view the Iranian nuclear program as a threat?

## **CHAPTER V**

This concluding chapter is an assessment of U.S. and Russian views of nuclear proliferation, starting with the Eisenhower era “Atoms for Peace” initiative.<sup>8</sup> Key events during this time, along with the end of the Cold War in particular, may explain why the United States and Russia have seemingly opposing views of nuclear proliferation regarding Iran. This chapter evaluates the importance both nations place on the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) with regard to controlling the spread of nuclear weapons. It also seeks to answer three important questions. First, what importance does the United States and Russia place on the IAEA and NPT as instruments to control the spread of nuclear weapons? Second, how have U.S. and Russian threat perceptions of Iran changed over time, and what impact has this had on their willingness cooperate on an Iranian nuclear program? Third, do the actions of Russia and the United States provide a clear indication that they share the same positions on nuclear proliferation?

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<sup>8</sup> Sokolski, *Best of Intentions*, 30.

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## **II. THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR OPPOSING U.S. AND RUSSIAN VIEWS OF NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

What explains Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran when the United States is critical of such actions? Do Russia and the United States share similar views of nuclear nonproliferation? What accounts for their apparent differences regarding Iran's nuclear ambitions? To begin answering these questions, this chapter first seeks to explain the issues of nuclear proliferation, and then focus on theoretical explanations for why one state may view another as a threat, when others do not. The ultimate aim of this chapter is to evaluate these issues and theories in order to understand the sources and magnitude of differences that the United States and Russia have regarding nuclear proliferation in Iran.

### **B. NUCLEAR PESSIMISM VS. NUCLEAR OPTIMISM**

When discussing nuclear proliferation, it is important to establish a basic framework of reference. In general, "nuclear proliferation" is defined as "an increasing number of non-nuclear states and, possibly in the future, non-state organizations, gaining access to nuclear weapons."<sup>9</sup> This definition encompasses two related components – vertical and horizontal proliferation. Vertical Proliferation is defined as "a nuclear buildup by the leading nuclear states." Horizontal Proliferation is defined as "an increase in the number of countries having nuclear armaments in their armies."<sup>10</sup> Throughout the rest of this thesis, the reader should understand that references to "nuclear proliferation" should actually be interpreted as meaning "horizontal proliferation," unless noted otherwise.

To understand whether the United States and Russia have similar views of nuclear proliferation, this chapter explores the prevailing viewpoints on the subject. There are essentially two opposing views of nuclear proliferation – the pessimists and the optimists, best represented by the work of Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz respectively. The

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<sup>9</sup> Alexei Arbatov, "Horizontal Proliferation: New Challenges," *Russia In Global Affairs* 2, no. 2 (April/June 2004), 136, [http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/docs/2004\\_english2.pdf](http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/docs/2004_english2.pdf) (December 15, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

pessimists argue that the spread of nuclear weapons will not lead to a more peaceful world, but will instead lead to greater instability. Conversely, the optimists claim that the gradual spread of nuclear weapons will lead to greater stability and peace. They argue that those who acquire nuclear weapons will understand their destructive potential and will be less likely to use them for fear of retaliation. The views of the two prominent scholars who adhere to these respective positions are discussed below.

### **1. Pessimistic View of Nuclear Proliferation – Scott Sagan**

Taking the pessimistic view, Sagan argues that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is bad, primarily due to inherent problems in large-scale organizations including militaries. His argument rests on two central points. First, he argues that “professional military organizations – because of common biases, inflexible routines, and parochial interests – display organizational behaviors that are likely to lead to deterrence failures and deliberate or accidental war.”<sup>11</sup> For deterrence to work, these military organizations need to have strong civilian oversight to overcome these inherent limitations. Second, he argues that future nuclear states may lack effective civilian control over their militaries due to weak governments and strong, inward-looking, politically-motivated military establishments. Thus, they would be more prone to causing a deterrence failure or accidental war. While the United States and Soviet Union successfully deterred one another from a nuclear exchange during the Cold War, Sagan believes they should not be considered a model for future nuclear weapons states. Even in countries with strong civilian control – such as the United States and Soviet Union – the complex nature of military organizations led to many near misses.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, Sagan provides a dismal outlook for the future of nuclear proliferation. Unlike his critics, he believes that new nuclear states are a great risk to peace and stability. Even if they do act rationally, the potential still exists to have a catastrophic nuclear accident. Consequently, he believes that the best way to prevent a future nuclear detonation is to stop new states from acquiring nuclear weapons, and/or to convince

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<sup>11</sup> Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2003), 47.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 46-48

them, for reasons previously cited, that it is not in their best interest to acquire such weapons.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, in his response to optimist Kenneth Waltz, Sagan states,

While we may agree about how nuclear states actually do behave in an *ideal* world (if any nuclear world can be called ideal), we strongly disagree about how nuclear states actually do behave in the *real* world. Our different visions of international politics have led us to develop very different interpretations of our nuclear past and very different predictions of the nuclear future.<sup>14</sup>

In this statement, Sagan provides a key piece of information that may help explain the inconsistency in U.S. and Russian perceptions of Iran. Simply said, both he and Waltz arrived at entirely different interpretations by exploring the same nuclear history. How they arrived at these different interpretations is explored later in this chapter.

Sagan's final key point highlights the growing threat posed by non-state actors, such as terrorists. For example, many Jihadi terrorists believe it is their religious duty to kill as many American citizens as possible. This is not a threat to be taken lightly; it serves as a constant reminder of the important role played by the nonproliferation regime. If nuclear weapons spread to the Middle East, there is an increased likelihood that a weak state may let an atomic weapon fall into the hands of terrorists, thereby creating the potential for unimaginable devastation. Based on his knowledge of organization theory, Sagan believes that parochial organizations would likely control the acquisition of such nuclear weapons and that their special interests could play right into the hands of terrorists. Thus, the only way to prevent such groups from acquiring a nuclear weapon in the first place is to work aggressively to curb nuclear proliferation to weak states.<sup>15</sup>

## **2. Optimistic View of Nuclear Proliferation – Kenneth Waltz**

Unlike his pessimistic colleague, Waltz takes the optimistic view of proliferation. He argues that the gradual spread of nuclear weapons, when compared to them spreading rapidly or not at all, will ultimately decrease the likelihood of a nuclear exchange. According to realist theory, states engage in self-help to provide for their own security in an anarchic world. When a state feels secure from external threats, there is a reduced

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<sup>13</sup> Sagan and Waltz, 84-85.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 162-164, 184.

likelihood of interstate conflict. In applying the principle of self-help, states believe that they can attain this type of security by acquiring nuclear weapons as a deterrent to war. Waltz's rationale is based on the fact that there has been a long peace, without a general war since 1945, which he attributes to the advent of nuclear weapons. In a conventional war, states take risks based on expected outcomes which, even in defeat, indicate limited damage and suffering. Nuclear wars, on the other hand, promise uncertainty and unimaginable devastation. Therefore, based on the realist principle of self-preservation, it is unlikely that a state would use nuclear weapons knowing that retaliation may threaten its very existence.<sup>16</sup>

The point of Waltz's argument is that new states that acquire nuclear weapons – even those considered weak – are likely to act rationally for reasons previously mentioned. Developing a nuclear weapons program is not cheap and takes a tremendous amount of time and national commitment. Waltz simply does not accept the logic that a state, consisting of either a weak or radical government, would indiscriminately use nuclear weapons once it acquired them. By taking such action, a state would lose the very deterrent that it had worked so hard to acquire.<sup>17</sup> Regarding nuclear terrorism, he believes that states will act rationally and will not allow one of their nuclear weapons to get into the hands of terrorists. He goes on to say,

Fear of nuclear terror arises from the assumption that if terrorists *can* get nuclear weapons they *will* get them, and then all hell will break loose. This is comparable to assuming that if weak states get nuclear weapons, they will use them for aggression. Both assumptions are false.<sup>18</sup>

Even if terrorists acquired a nuclear weapon, he dismisses the possibility its use since they would have to come out of their safe havens to store, protect, and use it. In so doing, they would make themselves a target and lose their deterrent potential. Simply said, terrorists seek political gains that can only be achieved through the credibility of causing nuclear terrorism.

Ultimately, Waltz argues that the largest nuclear states pose the greatest threat today. These states spend entirely too much time preventing smaller states

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<sup>16</sup> Sagan and Waltz, 3-9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 10-13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 130.

from acquiring nuclear weapons, and less time on safeguarding their own nuclear arsenals. By securing their own arsenals, large nuclear states may attain a greater degree of safety since smaller states have fewer weapons to secure.<sup>19</sup>

### **3. U.S. and Russian Views of Proliferation – Pessimist or Optimist?**

Presidents Bush and Putin indicated their commitments to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons at the Signing of the nuclear arms treaty on May 24, 2002. In a joint press conference, President Bush stated that,

President Putin and I agree also that the greatest danger in this war [on terrorism] is the prospect of terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Our nations must spare no effort at preventing all forms of proliferation. And we discussed Iran in this context today. We'll work closely with each other on this very important issue.<sup>20</sup>

President Putin then added,

I will confirm what Mr. Bush has just said, and I agree with your evaluation of threats in this regard. Generally speaking, I believe that the problem of nonproliferation is one of the key problems as regards ensuring international security.<sup>21</sup>

Their statements logically lead one to conclude that the United States and Russia share Scott Sagan's pessimistic outlook of nuclear proliferation. Both nations are represented on the IAEA Board of Governors and support the IAEA in its role as the United Nations' nuclear watchdog agency. However, in spite of their commitment to the nonproliferation regime, they are divided in their views of the Iranian nuclear program. This was evident when Russia abstained from voting on a September 24, 2005, IAEA resolution, citing Iran for noncompliance with its safeguards agreement, and during the UN Security Council deliberations on Iran.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sagan and Waltz, 154-155.

<sup>20</sup> George W. Bush, U.S. President and Vladimir Putin, Russian President, "Remarks at Signing of Joint Declaration and Press Availability," May 24, 2002, available online at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/05/20020524-10.html> (January 15, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Kerr, "IAEA Reports Iran to UN Security Council," *Arms Control Today* 36, no. 2, (March 2006), [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2006\\_03/MARCH-IAEAIran.asp](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2006_03/MARCH-IAEAIran.asp), (March 15, 2006). See also, RFE/RL, "UN: Security Council Appears Deadlocked Over Iran," March 14, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/03/76B1AD20-EA73-4168-A3BB-28B2C84E88D0.html> (March 16, 2006).

Why are they divided over Iran? In his February 2, 2005 State of the Union Address, President Bush stated that “we must confront regimes that continue to harbor terrorists and pursue weapons of mass murder.” He later added, “Today, Iran remains the world’s primary state sponsor of terror – pursuing nuclear weapons while depriving its people of the freedom they seek and deserve.”<sup>23</sup> Russia, on the other hand, does not hold this view. In fact, after meeting with Iranian Security Chief Hasan Rowhani on February 18, 2005, President Putin stated,

We are deeply convinced that the spread of nuclear arms across our planet does not help strengthen security either in the region or around the world. And the latest steps taken by Iran have convinced us that Iran does not intend to produce nuclear arms. In this context, we will continue cooperation with Iran in all areas, including the nuclear energy field.<sup>24</sup>

While Putin reiterated concerns about the proliferation of nuclear weapons, his statement regarding Iran diverges from the view expressed by his American counterpart two weeks prior. This division poses a significant problem for the IAEA and the nonproliferation regime.

How can two superpowers, each with the largest nuclear arsenals and stated commitments to nonproliferation, be so divided over Iran’s nuclear ambitions? Based on these presidential statements, it makes sense to conclude that the United States and Russia do share the same views of nuclear proliferation and subscribe to Scott Sagan’s pessimistic view of proliferation. The most logical explanation for this division is that the United States and Russia have different threat perceptions of the Iranian nuclear program. This topic is addressed in the sections to follow.

### **C. STEPHEN WALT – WHAT DO STATES CONSIDER A THREAT?**

In order to understand why the United States feels threatened by Iran’s nuclear ambitions and Russia does not, this thesis turns to the work of Stephen Walt. Walt emphasizes that threat perceptions play an important role in alliance formation. While the issue dividing the United States and Russia is not about an “alliance” in the truest sense of the definition, Russia’s nuclear cooperation with Iran does provide a certain

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<sup>23</sup> George W. Bush, U.S. President, “State of the Union Address,” February 2, 2005, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050202-11.html> (January 10, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Vladimir Putin, Russian President, “Russia to Continue Nuclear Cooperation with Iran,” February 18, 2005, [http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/0.html?id\\_issue=10751650](http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/0.html?id_issue=10751650) (February 23, 2005).



“level of commitment and exchange of benefits for both parties,” absent the fears expressed by the United States.<sup>25</sup> It is in this context that Walt’s work is used to help provide an explanation for the different threat perceptions of Iran’s nuclear program.

Walt debunks the contemporary wisdom in the balance of power theory advocated by Kenneth Waltz. He argues that states form alliances to balance against specific threats. Whereas the balance of power theory focuses on alignment against another power, Walt discovered that it did not take into account the type of threat. He further expounds on his theory by evaluating the level of threat that a state may pose to others, based on geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions.<sup>26</sup>

Using Walt’s argument, it would appear that Russia has ample reason to fear nuclear cooperation with Iran, more so than the United States. While Russia does not share a direct border with Iran, the two countries are geographically located within a few hundred kilometers of one another – separated only by Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan – as compared to the several thousand kilometers that separate the United States and Iran. Sergei Karaganov, Deputy Director of the Institute of Europe, Chairman of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, reiterated this point by stating,

The problem is that acquisition of nuclear weapons by Tehran is unacceptable either for the region’s countries, or for the great powers, primarily for Russia, which is located in the direct proximity of Iran, and within reach of potential Iranian nuclear delivery vehicles.<sup>27</sup>

Karaganov’s comments indicate that Russia should fear a nuclear-armed Iran just as much as the United States does, especially due to their geographical proximity. Yet, Russia has not wavered in its nuclear cooperation with Iran. One explanation for this is that Iran currently has limited offensive capabilities in its conventional forces and is, therefore, not deemed a threat.

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<sup>25</sup> In Stephen M. Walt, *Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 1, Walt defines *Alliance* “as a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states. This definition assumes some level of commitment and an exchange of benefits for both parties; severing the relationship or failing to honor the agreement would presumably cost something, even if it were compensated in other ways.”

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>27</sup> Sergei Karaganov, “Iran: Last Chance But One,” *Ria Novosti*, February 7, 2006, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20060207/43404182.html> (February 8, 2006).

The key source of disagreement, between the United States and Russia over Iran's nuclear program, appears to be linked to Walt's third level of threat criteria, that of "perceived intentions."<sup>28</sup> In the same article where he expressed concern over a nuclear-armed Iran, Karaganov stated, "On the whole we have viewed and continue to view Iran as a friendly nation, and a potentially valuable geopolitical partner in the region."<sup>29</sup> Herein lies the apparent contradiction. On one hand, Russia cooperates with Iran on its nuclear program – knowing full well that the IAEA has passed a resolution indicating that Iran had violated its safeguards agreement – yet states concern over a nuclear armed Iran. The only logical explanation for this apparent contradiction is that Russia truly perceives that Iran will not act in any hostile way towards Russia. As Walt states, "Perceptions of intent are likely to play an especially crucial role in alliance choices."<sup>30</sup> So, for the present time, Russia, although not in a formal security alliance with Iran, appears to be reaping the mutual benefit of nuclear cooperation with Iran. This brings us back to our original question: Why do the United States and Russia have such varying threat perceptions of the Iranian nuclear program? The answer to this question is addressed in the section below.

#### **D. ROBERT JERVIS – ARE THREAT PERCEPTIONS IMPORTANT?**

To explain the opposing views of Iran's nuclear program, this section will explore the work of Robert Jervis, a prominent scholar who has written on the psychological factors in perception. The significance of Jervis' work in international politics is that he emphasizes the importance that perception has on decision-making. Whereas Walt emphasized that perception was important in alliance formation, Jervis goes one step further by looking at the psychological factors affecting perception. In particular, he argues that perceptions are extremely important in evaluating the actions of others, and possibly, whether they are considered a threat.<sup>31</sup> This line of reasoning is particularly important in exploring the opposing views of Iran.

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<sup>28</sup> Walt, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Karaganov, "Iran: Last Chance But One."

<sup>30</sup> Walt, 25.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 6-10.

## **1. Do Perceptions Matter?**

The previous section concluded that Russia and the United States have different threat perceptions of the Iranian nuclear program. Although this conclusion provides a good reference point, it also raises some important questions. Do perceptions really matter in the course of international affairs? Does it matter that two countries have different perceptions of another's intentions? The answer to these questions should be intuitively obvious. According to Jervis, "Judging others' intentions is notoriously difficult."<sup>32</sup> The implication of his statement is that misjudging others' intentions is dangerous. Wars have erupted over misread signals or misperceived actions and intentions of another nation. For example, the United States did not perceive Japan would act in such a hostile manner to the oil embargo, any more than Japan expected an all out war with the United States after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.<sup>33</sup>

In the case of Iran, the stakes are equally high. While the disagreement over Iran's nuclear ambitions remains a key issue of diplomacy at the IAEA, it has the potential to escalate if a consensus is not achieved. President Bush has stated that "all options are on the table" to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, this has the potential to create a crisis if diplomacy fails and the United States acts either unilaterally or with a small coalition against Iran, because Russia views Iran as a "friendly nation" with peaceful nuclear ambitions.<sup>35</sup> Clearly, perceptions do matter.

## **2. Where Do Perceptions Come From?**

While knowing that perceptions are important, it is also worthwhile to understand how perceptions are formed. In this regard, the work of Robert Jervis cannot be underestimated. He not only emphasizes the role that threat perceptions have on decision makers, but more importantly, he explains how decision makers learn or acquire these perceptions. By understanding their own biases or cognitive tendencies, it may be possible to explain why decision makers act as they do. As Jervis put it, "what one learns

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 14.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 26, 28.

<sup>34</sup> George W. Bush, U.S. President, "Interview of the President by Israeli Television Channel 1," August 11, 2005, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/08/20050812-2.html> (January 31, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Karaganov, "Iran: Last Chance But One."

from key events in international history is an important factor in determining the images that shape the interpretation of incoming information.”<sup>36</sup> It is this interpretive process that shapes a decision maker’s or state’s view of the world around it, and ultimately their policies. Recall in a previous section how Scott Sagan explained the differences in views held by Kenneth Waltz and himself by stating, “Our different visions of international politics have led us to develop very different interpretations of our nuclear past and very different predictions of the nuclear future.”<sup>37</sup>

In the course of everyday life, people experience a variety of stimuli and information that they must process and use to govern their daily actions. Some of this information may be stored away and deemed unimportant, while other bits may be classified as significant. The cognitive process of learning, or processing of information as important or unimportant, has a definite impact on how people see and relate to the world around them. What causes something to be deemed more important than something else? According to Jervis, “people pay the most attention to what happens to them and those they identify with.”<sup>38</sup> He lists four events from which people learn the most and are likely to shape their future predispositions: <sup>39</sup>

- Firsthand Experiences – Strong images are shaped by seeing and experiencing something first hand. Just as eyewitness accounts can vary, cognitive predispositions can shape how an event is interpreted and used.
- Early Experiences or Generational Effects – People typically learn more in their early adult life that can shape their policies later in their careers. Sometimes it is only the most recent events that matter, however, since there is such a long gap between early adult experiences and the age that they enter political office and are capable of formulating policies.

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<sup>36</sup> Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 217.

<sup>37</sup> Sagan and Waltz, 157.

<sup>38</sup> Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 235.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 239.

- Events Important to the Person's State or Organization – Typically, a revolution, or the last war, has a tremendous impact on how decision makers respond to new sources of conflict.
- Range of Available Alternative Analogies – The fewer significant events a decision-maker has to draw from, the greater the potential to misinterpret future occurrences. Conversely, decision makers with a much greater experience base are less likely to be influenced by a single event and have much more to draw from in execution of policies.

Ultimately, it is the type of learning that has a tremendous impact on how decision makers perceive the world around them.

### **3. What Impact Do Perceptions Have on Decision Makers?**

Understanding international relations is a very complex, dynamic process, shaped by the actions and reactions of various actors. Decision-makers often rely on their predispositions of others to shape their own actions; due to their own biases, however, they may not get a complete picture of the world around them. Jervis presents two views that may help explain opposing U.S. and Russian threat perceptions of Iran. First, he states,

The decision maker who thinks that the other side is probably hostile will see ambiguous information confirming this image, whereas the same information about a country thought to be friendly would be taken more benignly.<sup>40</sup>

Second, he notes that,

Under other circumstances, states will be motivated to perceive a threat as smaller or less troublesome than it actually is. When statesmen become committed to a given policy, they will feel strong psychological pressures to perceive that the threats they face can be overcome.<sup>41</sup>

As noted, there are inherent problems with a state's threat perceptions of others. Only by realizing the tendency to attribute biases in its threat perceptions of others, can a state gain a clearer picture of the dangers at hand.

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<sup>40</sup> Jervis, Lebow, and Stein, *Perceiving and Coping with Threat*, 18.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 26.

So why do the United States and Russia differ so widely in their threat perceptions of Iran's nuclear program? As previously mentioned, both nations acknowledge their concerns with, and the risks associated with, proliferation. Both have a pessimistic outlook for the future of proliferation. Both nations have been on favorable and unfavorable terms with Iran through the years, and both have contributed to the building of Iran's nuclear infrastructure. At this point, it would seem that the United States and Russia have different threat perceptions of Iran, shaped by their dealings with the Islamic Republic and affected by their willingness to proliferation. Russia sees Iran as a peaceful nation and the United States does not. Russia does not acknowledge a problem cooperating with Iran on its civilian nuclear program, whereas the United States does. The remainder of this thesis tests this hypothesis in light of the historical record.

#### **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The next three chapters examine the empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that the differences in the United States' and Russia's view of Iran can be explained through their historical relations with the Islamic Republic. The United States' and Russia's relations with Iran may yield clues as to why they have different threat perceptions of the Islamic Republic, and hence, attitudes towards nuclear proliferation. Major cleavages in relations may help explain why their threat perceptions have changed through the years. If these anticipated links hold true, it may explain the opposing positions that the two nations have taken at the IAEA regarding Iran.

### III. RUSSIAN – IRANIAN RELATIONS: 1953–2005

Although Russia has expressed concern about Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, Moscow continues to support Iran’s nuclear energy program – in spite of repeated criticism from the international community. In an interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Vladimir Orlov, director of the Center for Policy Studies in Moscow, indicated that cooperation with Iran is not without scrutiny or limitations, but that “so far we see peaceful intentions by Iran.”<sup>42</sup> This position placed Russia at odds with the majority of the IAEA members who cited Iran’s safeguards violations in September 2005, and members of the Security Council who pressed for economic sanctions. By taking such actions, the international community signaled that it did not view Iran’s intentions as entirely peaceful. What explains Russia’s opposing view? Using the logic of Jervis, Russia’s peaceful perception of Iran was formed through learning that took place during “key events in international history.”<sup>43</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to explain Russia’s rationale for cooperating with Iran and why its threat perceptions of the Iranian nuclear program are so different from those held by the United States. Using Jervis’ theory on how threat perceptions are formed, this chapter analyzes Russian – Iranian relations from 1953 to 2005, focusing on the evolution of relations with regard to economic, nuclear, and strategic interests. Through a critical analysis of their past and present relations, this chapter provides one part of the framework to help explain the different threat perceptions that the two nuclear superpowers hold. By understanding these differences, U.S. policy-makers may be able to devise a better plan of engagement to curtail Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

#### A. 1953–1979: BALANCING EAST AGAINST WEST

As tensions grew early in the Cold War, the Soviet Union realized that Iran held a strategic position on its southern frontier and, therefore, pursued a two-pronged foreign policy approach to counter American imperialism. By pursuing “state-to-state and

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<sup>42</sup> RFE/RL, “Iran: Analyst Says Russia Becoming More Critical of Tehran,” January 12, 2006 obtained from *Johnson’s Russia List*, <http://www.cdi.org/Russia/Johnson/2006-13-32.cfm> (January 15, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 217.

Communist Party to Communist Party” relations with Iran, the Soviets could openly express their intent for goodwill, while engaging in subversive tactics to undermine the regime.<sup>44</sup> Realizing that the Iranians harbored feelings of ill will due to the Soviet’s refusal to pull their troops out after World War II – and due to subversive activities of the Communist Tudeh Party – Soviet Premier Georgi Malenkov highlighted his plan for rapprochement with Iran to the Supreme Soviet on August 8, 1953:

The experience of three and a half decades has shown mutual friendship and co-operation are in the interests of the Soviet Union and Iran. Hence, there is a firm basis for Soviet-Iranian relations, which makes it possible to settle issues arising between the two parties to their mutual satisfaction....Whether Soviet-Iranian relations will develop on good neighborly lines, on the lines of extension of commercial and cultural intercourse, depends on the Iranian government.<sup>45</sup>

The Soviets did not view Iran as a threat by itself, but did, however, feel threatened by Iranian alignment with the United States. The last thing the Soviets wanted was to have their imperialist rival establish a foothold on their southern frontier.<sup>46</sup>

### **1. U.S. Coup and Soviet Reaction**

About the same time Malenkov was extending an outstretched hand to Teheran, the United States began to initiate a coup to remove Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq and reinstate the Shah to the throne. This coup was executed primarily over fears that Iranian nationalism would play into the hands of the Iranian Tudeh Party, and ultimately lead to a Communist government. Although this was not a welcomed move in Moscow, the Soviets did little more than express verbal opposition, blasting the United States for creating a puppet government. In spite of their protests, Moscow continued to seek friendly relations with Iran. A few weeks after the coup, the Soviets had reason to rejoice when a long-awaited agreement to increase trade with Iran was reached on September 3, 1953.<sup>47</sup> For now, the Soviets were content with the status quo.

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<sup>44</sup> Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 80.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Sicker, *The Bear and the Lion* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 86.

<sup>46</sup> Nikki R. Keddie and Mark J. Gasiorowski, eds., *Neither East Nor West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 68

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.



Feelings of good will soon shifted when Iran signed the Baghdad Pact on November 3, 1956, effectively tilting the balance away from the Soviets once again. Moscow viewed this as an act of aggression since it contained an implied security commitment from the United States, accompanied with provisions for military equipment sales. The Soviets vacillated between coercion and diplomacy to get Iran to denounce this threatening agreement and pressured Iran, without success, to sign a fifty-year nonaggression pact. When Iraq pulled out of the Baghdad Pact in 1958, the remaining countries, Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran, renamed it the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). While not a formal member of CENTO, the United States signed bilateral security agreements with each country in 1959, further adding to Soviet hostility.<sup>48</sup>

## **2. The Scales Tilt East**

At the start of the 1960s, Soviet-Iranian relations remained cold – until the Shah had a falling out with the United States following an April 1962 visit. When the Kennedy Administration announced a cutback in military and economic aid, the Shah decided to improve Iran's neighborly relations with the Soviets based on mutual respect. As a conciliatory gesture of good will, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Aram Abbas, sent a letter to the Soviet ambassador on September 15, 1962, indicating that Iran agreed to a nonaggression arrangement and that it would not permit the stationing of Western nuclear missiles on its territory.<sup>49</sup> The Soviets feared such stationing and were more concerned about the threat posed by American forces than the threat posed by Iran. Up until this point, the Shah was perceived as little more than an American puppet who acted only in Washington's interest, a view consistent with Jervis' reasoning that "statesmen are often more worried about how the other acts than about what it does."<sup>50</sup> Thus, the Shah's pledge was a welcomed gesture in Moscow, where the perception signaled a psychological break with Washington, and served as a turning point in Soviet – Iranian relations.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> George Lenczowski, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East* (Washington: American Institute for Public Policy Research, 1972), 30. See also Martin Sicker, *The Bear and the Lion*, 86-90.

<sup>49</sup> Sicker, 92-93. See also, Keddie and Gasiorowski, 71.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 14-15.

<sup>51</sup> Sicker, 93.

The Soviets subsequently sent a delegation to Teheran on December 19, headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Lapin, to “discuss cultural, economic, and technical cooperation.”<sup>52</sup> As a token of good will, the Soviets agreed to reopen a land route for Iran to use through the Soviet Union to Western Europe. This was a significant economic concession for the Iranians since 65 percent of their total trade was with Western Europe. The following summer, they agreed to help construct a hydroelectric plant on the bordering Aras River. In November, Leonid Brezhnev made his first official visit, concluding key technical and economic agreements to reaffirm Moscow’s commitment to improve relations, and to signal approval for Soviet bloc countries to follow suit.<sup>53</sup>

Relations continued to improve after the Shah’s June 1965 state visit to Moscow, where they reached even more trade agreements.<sup>54</sup> The timing of this visit was of particular significance to the Soviets, since the United States had ceased to provide military and economic aid to Iran. By focusing on economic ties, the Soviets planned to gain greater influence in Iran and achieve the upper hand over their Cold War rival. In January 1966, Iran agreed to sell “up to 10,000 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year between 1970 and 1985” to the Soviets. This opened up an entirely new industry in Iran, since gas was normally burned off during oil production. In return, the Soviets agreed to build a 42-inch gas pipeline from Iran’s “Khuzistan fields to the Soviet border west of the Caspian Sea.”<sup>55</sup> This served Soviet interests well by substituting gas for domestic oil usage, thereby allowing the sale of excess oil on the open market. The natural gas deal also provided the means for Iran to pay for some of the \$110 million in Soviet military equipment it had ordered in the form of vehicles and small arms in January 1967. The significance of this arms deal was that it was the first such agreement between the Soviet Union and any member of an active Western defense agreement. Thus, it effectively indicated the dual nature of Iran’s foreign policy of purchasing military supplies from both the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Sicker, 93.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Lenczowski, 32.

<sup>55</sup> Sicker, 100. See also, Aaron S. Klieman, *Soviet Russia and the Middle East* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 51.

<sup>56</sup> Lenczowski, 35. See also, Klieman, 51, and Sicker, 101.

### **3. Separating Politics and Economics**

While their level of cooperation may have indicated warm relations, their actions in the late 1960s and early 1970s caused a certain degree of suspicion and mistrust. The British departure from the Persian Gulf region created a power vacuum that the Soviets did not want replaced unless it was in accordance with their strategic plans. Iran initially went along with this plan and remained neutral until the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. This hostile action caused the Shah to question the Soviet's true intentions in the Gulf, and effectively swayed him back to the side of Washington. During a visit in October 1969, the Shah received the "go ahead" from President Nixon to assume more of a regional role for stability in the Middle East, which had been his long-time goal. Although this move disturbed the Soviets, they continued bilateral relations as if nothing had happened. When the Soviets signed a cooperation agreement with India on August 9, 1971, to contain China, it threatened Iran's influence in the Indian Ocean and so the Shah countered by forging his own agreement with the Peoples Republic of China. Moscow did not expect this move and subsequently decided to rethink their strategy for Iran. To further complicate relations, Iran learned that the Soviets had forged a friendship treaty with Iraq and would gain access to a naval facility in return; this had the unintended consequence of causing Iran to further strengthen ties with the United States.<sup>57</sup>

Despite these setbacks, the Soviets continued to focus on economic relations. In April 1974, the Soviets agreed to build a second natural gas pipeline (IGAT-2). This agreement stressed the strategic importance of their economic relations and allowed Iran to begin selling natural gas to Austria, Czechoslovakia, France and West Germany at the Soviet border. To secure a steady supply of natural gas to Transcaucasia, the Soviets even agreed to absorb the cost of shipping the gas from the border to the areas where Iran would market it.<sup>58</sup> During the Shah's visit to Moscow in November 1974, Nikolai Podgorny, President of the Presidium of the Soviet Union, made a key statement.

Relations between the USSR and Iran continue to develop and strengthen steadily. The Soviet-Iranian cooperation is built on the solid foundation of mutual respect, equality, noninterference in the affairs of each other...The

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<sup>57</sup> Sicker, 102-104.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 105.

policy of friendship and good neighborliness pursued by our countries in their relations is that of peaceful coexistence in action.<sup>59</sup>

In this statement, the Soviets publicly reaffirmed their desire to focus on economic relations with Iran, an area where they knew Western influence was the weakest.

#### **4. Mirage in the Desert**

By 1978, the Soviets began to change their tactics with Iran. In late 1978, General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev publicly supported the Shah while the Soviet-backed Voice of Iran radio in Azerbaijan called for his overthrow and replacement by an Islamic government.<sup>60</sup> Up to this point, the Soviets and Iranians had signed economic agreements based on good neighborly relations irrespective of political ideology. The Soviets tolerated the Shah's regime primarily because he pursued an "acceptable" foreign policy. Even though Iran had a strong military and was politically oriented towards the United States, the Soviets did not have any reason to fear Iran's intentions since its forces were primarily oriented towards the South.<sup>61</sup> As the Shah's domestic support faded and it was apparent that his pro-Western regime would crumble, Moscow changed its rhetoric in November 1978, and publicly called for the Shah's overthrow. Moscow even warned the United States not to interfere in Iran's internal affairs, fearing U.S. involvement similar to what it had done in 1953.<sup>62</sup>

The Soviets were cautious of the Islamic revolution's ideological differences from Communism, but quickly embraced its anti-American sentiment. Ayatollah Khomeini systematically removed all barriers that had served as impediments to improved relations with the Shah's regime; he pulled Iran out of the 1959 CENTO agreement and declared a nonaligned policy in the East – West conflict. In addition, he allowed the Tudeh Party, formerly illegal under the Shah, to operate in the open; this move prompted Moscow to change the Tudeh's leadership and order support for the Islamic movement. With U.S. influence declining, the Soviets viewed rapprochement with Iran extremely optimistic.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Sicker, 105.

<sup>60</sup> Kenneth R. Timmerman, "Iran Shows Its Soviet Sympathies," *Wall Street Journal* (Eastern edition), March 10, 1989, 1.

<sup>61</sup> Keddie and Gasiorowski, 71-72.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>63</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "The Soviet Union and Iran under Khomeini," *International Affairs* 57, no. 4 (Autumn, 1981), 599-601.

It did not take long before Soviet optimism began to fade after Khomeini's February 1, 1979 arrival in Teheran. Moscow reaffirmed Khomeini's deep-rooted suspicion two days after he met with the Soviet ambassador, reminding Iran that their 1921 Treaty authorizes the Soviets to intervene in the affairs of its southern neighbor if the border was threatened. While the Soviets may have been trying to justify their "imperialist" actions in Afghanistan, Khomeini became all the more critical. To alleviate Khomeini's concern, Leonid Brezhnev issued a public statement of good will on March 3, 1979, as follows:

We wish the new revolutionary Iran success and prosperity and hope that relations of good neighborliness between the peoples of the Soviet Union and Iran will fruitfully develop in the new conditions on the firm foundations of mutual respect, goodwill and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.<sup>64</sup>

The only response Brezhnev received was Khomeini's continued criticism of the Soviet's support for a Communist take-over in Afghanistan, where he urged Moscow not to interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs.<sup>65</sup> However, this was not enough to deter the Soviet Union's full-scale invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, which further exacerbated Khomeini's criticism and mistrust.

## **B. 1980–1991: UNEXPECTED PATH TO RAPPROCHEMENT**

Although Iranian distrust of Soviet intentions remained a constant obstacle to improved relations in the 1980s, the Soviets had learned the importance of staying the course in their attempts to gain influence in Iran. Prior to the revolution, the Soviet Union was Iran's largest export market for manufactured goods, whereas Iran was the Soviet's largest market for non-military goods in the Middle East.<sup>66</sup> After Iranian revolutionaries seized the United States Embassy and took U.S. and Canadian diplomats hostage in November 1979, Leonid Brezhnev feared U.S. involvement once again and warned the United States, in January 1980, not to interfere in Iran's internal affairs. While he meant to calm Iranian mistrust of the Soviet Union with his warning, it had the opposite effect. Iran became alarmed that a U.S. threat may trigger a Soviet invasion,

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<sup>64</sup> Sicker, 111.

<sup>65</sup> Rubinstein, 603-604.

<sup>66</sup> Keddie and Gasiorowski, 70.

authorized under the 1921 Treaty that was upheld by Moscow and renounced by Khomeini. In fact, Khomeini's suspicion and distrust for the Soviets was clearly evident in his labeling of the Soviet Union as the "other Great Satan."<sup>67</sup>

### **1. Dangerous Courtship**

The Soviets achieved great success penetrating Iran through economic and trade agreements, and believed this was still the best policy under the circumstances. Iranian oil production decreased following the revolution, directly impacting the amount of natural gas available. When the Soviets refused to pay a five-fold price increase in natural gas, Iran cut off all shipments to the Soviet Union on April 6, 1980, causing serious shortages in the adjoining territories. In retaliation, Moscow terminated Iran's ability to ship products destined for European markets across its territories. Iran quickly learned that it was in no position to sever economic ties with the Soviet Union, especially since it was suffering from a U.S. economic embargo. As a result, the Iranian Minister of Economy and Finance traveled to Moscow to work out a new agreement, signed later on September 16, 1980. After some delay, the Soviets did restore transit rights, even though Iran never reciprocated on the shipment of natural gas.<sup>68</sup>

Although the situation in Afghanistan continued to affect their relations, the Soviet Union decided to take an "official" position of neutrality when Iraq invaded Iran on September 22, 1980. Iran welcomed this change, since the Soviets had previously sided with Iraq during the 1974–1975 Iraq-Iran conflict due to a friendship treaty.<sup>69</sup> One possible explanation for the Soviet position was that the border facilities could not keep up with the heavy volume of Iranian goods shipped across the Soviet territories when the war started.<sup>70</sup> Clearly, Moscow recognized that it was important not distance itself too far from Iran at this time and tolerated Iran's accusations that the Soviets were secretly selling arms and providing military advisors to Iraq. In February 1981, Leonid Brezhnev "reiterated the Soviet desire to develop good relations with Iran based on reciprocity" and "heralded the Iranian revolution as profoundly anti-imperialist" while speaking at the

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<sup>67</sup> Hunter, 83-84.

<sup>68</sup> Sicker, 120-122.

<sup>69</sup> Rubinstein, 609-610.

<sup>70</sup> Sicker, 122.

Twenty-Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The two countries followed this gesture of good will in July by signing agreements to allow indirect sales of arms, commercial trade, and Soviet military advisors to go to Iran.<sup>71</sup>

## **2. Risky Business**

As the Soviets openly proclaimed their good will towards Iran, the Tudeh Party was engaged in subversive activities at the bequest of Moscow. In May 1982, it was estimated that hundreds of KGB Farsi speaking agents were working in Iran; later that year the number had jumped to nearly 2,000. It was clear that Moscow was working doubly hard to secure its interests with its southern neighbor. In a drastic turn of events, several party leaders were arrested as KGB spies in February 1983, followed by the expulsion of eighteen Soviet diplomats for spying on May 18. That same day, Ayatollah Khomeini outlawed the Tudeh once again and had hundreds more of its members rounded up and arrested. Moscow reacted by withdrawing many of its technical experts from Iran's industrial base, which caused a severe hardship for Iran. In addition, Moscow decided to turn its support to Iraq when it became apparent that Iran was on the offensive. Surprisingly, in spite of their openly provocative rhetoric, the Soviets and Iranians continued to expand their commercial economic ties.<sup>72</sup>

Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 and began promoting his new thinking towards Soviet policy. Although his position on Iran did not change significantly, he wanted to expand bilateral economic cooperation and was united with Iran's opposition to the United States' military presence in the Gulf.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, his position may have caused Iran to view rapprochement in a more positive light. Iran had previously viewed the Soviets with contempt, since they expressed little concern for Iraqi aggression and the Tudeh subversion indicated Moscow violated its pledge of noninterference. As the Iran-Iraq War raged on, however, Teheran recognized its need of economic and military assistance. Thus, it was no surprise when the Iranians warmly received Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Georgi Korniyenko in Teheran on February 26, 1986, and agreed to "expand economic and trade relations, and to conduct joint oil exploration in the

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<sup>71</sup> Timmerman, "Iran Shows Its Soviet Sympathies."

<sup>72</sup> Sicker, 123-126.

<sup>73</sup> Keddie and Gasiorowski, 82.

Caspian Sea.” The Soviet Oil minister followed in August, at which time Iran agreed to resume the natural gas exports to the Soviet Union that had been halted in 1980.<sup>74</sup>

### **3. Rapprochement at Last**

During the 1980s, Soviet – Iranian relations were strained primarily for two reasons: Soviet support for Iraq and its invasion of Afghanistan. Mikhail Gorbachev removed the first obstacle by tilting Soviet support back towards Iran in 1987 as a friendly gesture to improve economic ties, which improved even more after the war officially ended on August 20, 1988. He removed the second obstacle by ceasing operations in Afghanistan and beginning the withdrawal of Soviet troops in December 1988, a key event that signified the end of Islamic oppression. In essence, Gorbachev set the stage for the two countries to engage in meaningful dialogue; his efforts paid off when Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze visited Teheran on February 26, 1989, and was received by Ayatollah Khomeini. When the visit was over, Shevardnadze declared this to be an historic “turning point” in relations between the Soviet Union and Iran.<sup>75</sup>

The significance of this “turning point” is vital to understanding Russia’s current perceptions of Iran. To begin with, this was the first time a Soviet Foreign Minister had visited the Islamic Republic of Iran since the revolution. Second, Ayatollah Khomeini personally received Shevardnadze, a privilege never afforded to any other Foreign Minister.<sup>76</sup> Whereas Khomeini had formerly denounced the Soviet Union as one of Iran’s foreign devils, he now called for “greater cooperation between the two countries to combat the devilish acts of the west.”<sup>77</sup> Third, Iranian Majlis (Parliamentary) Speaker Hashemi-Rafsanjani reciprocated with a trip to Moscow in June 1989, and concluded a number of trade, military sales, and economic agreements. A joint communiqué was then issued, detailing their intent for further cooperation to include collaboration on the

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<sup>74</sup> Hunter, 89. See also, Sicker, 128.

<sup>75</sup> Timmerman, “Iran Shows Its Soviet Sympathies.”

<sup>76</sup> Keddie and Gasiorowski, 88.

<sup>77</sup> Timmerman, “Iran Shows Its Soviet Sympathies.”



“peaceful use of nuclear energy.” Mikhail Gorbachev was even quoted as saying “the Soviets maintain that the positive impacts of the visit would shortly be felt throughout the world.”<sup>78</sup>

The events at the beginning of the 1990s continued to fuel their cooperative relationship. Iran faced a security dilemma when the United States increased its military presence in the Gulf due to the war against Iraq. As Western influence entered the region once again, Iran could do little more than watch as the United States gained a foothold in the Gulf. Once a regional power, due in part to the Shah’s acquisition of U.S. military hardware, Iran’s military might, and air fleet in particular, had been degraded during its war with Iraq. Iran desired to be a regional power once again and wanted to expel the Westerners once again. This fueled Iran’s desire to regain its former military status in the Gulf to defy the West; this desire significantly increased its dependence on Soviet military equipment.<sup>79</sup> As for the Soviets, they were focused on improving their economic situation and desired to regain their influence in Iran. Thus, both nations benefited when they concluded a one billion dollar arms deal in 1991.<sup>80</sup>

### **C. 1992–1999: SHIFTING PRIORITIES**

President Boris Yeltsin’s foreign policy in the 1990s seemed inconsistent and disjointed, which was not totally unexpected considering that a 70-year-old empire broke apart and left Yeltsin to deal with its aftermath. In general, his policies in the 1990s aimed at improving relations with the West, exploiting oil in the Caspian Sea, maintaining relations with Iran which may have deterred Iranian Islamic interests in Central Asia, generating hard currency from arms and nuclear reactor sales, and countering NATO expansion.<sup>81</sup> While his foreign policy appears inconsistent, it must be noted that Yeltsin faced tremendous internal pressures from various interest groups that ultimately swayed his priorities.

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<sup>78</sup> “Islamic Republic News Agency [IRNA] on Communique,” June 25, 1989, in FBIS-NES – 89-121, June 26, 1989, 31-33.

<sup>79</sup> Robert O. Freedman, “Russian-Iranian Relations in the 1990s,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 4, no. 2, (June 2000), <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2000/issue2/jv4n2a5.html> (March 6, 2005).

<sup>80</sup> Peter Shearman, ed. *Russian Foreign Policy Since 1990* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 273.

<sup>81</sup> Robert O. Freedman, “Russia and Iran: A Tactical Alliance,” *SAIS Review* 17, no. 2, [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/sais\\_review/v017/17.2freedman.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/sais_review/v017/17.2freedman.html) (March 7, 2005).

Russia and Iran did not always see eye-to-eye in the 1990s, but remained committed to improving relations. When the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991, Russia faced a different domestic and international system. It was now surrounded by fourteen new states, four of which were Muslim; Azerbaijan was in Transcaucasia, and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan were in Central Asia.<sup>82</sup> Since Islam was suppressed under Soviet rule, Russia initially feared that Iran would spread Islamic radicalism to these new states due to their close proximity to the Middle East, or possibly impact Russia's 17 million practicing Muslims.<sup>83</sup> However, Kenneth Katzman points out that "the lack of strong Islamic movements in most of the new Muslim states does not adequately explain Iran's unexpected lack of political activism to its north."<sup>84</sup> He further adds, "Iranian policy makers appear to have concluded that they cannot risk offending Russia."<sup>85</sup>

Despite Russia's initial fears that Iran may not act responsibly, Iran gave Russia no reason to perceive ill intentions. Iranian President Rafsanjani was overly careful not to alienate Moscow while the Soviet Union was breaking up, and always focused on economic ties while downplaying the role of Islam. He even delayed recognizing Azerbaijan's independence, declared in November 1991, until after the Soviet Union had dissolved in December. This was essentially how Rafsanjani indicated to Moscow that Iran wanted to base their relationship on economics ties, and not Islam. Thus, with little reason to perceive hostile intentions from Iran, Russia felt it was safe to supply arms to Iran while furthering economic ties with the Islamic Republic.<sup>86</sup>

In 1992, Iran and Russia signed contracts that would have a significant bearing on their long-term relations. One was a significant arms contract valued in the range of \$4–

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<sup>82</sup> Robert O. Freedman, "Russian Policy Towards the Middle East Under Yeltsin and Putin," *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints* 461 (September 2, 2001), <http://www.jcpa.org/jl/vp461.htm> (March 10, 2005).

<sup>83</sup> Alain Gresh, "Russia's Return to the Middle East," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 1998): 75.

<sup>84</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Iran, Russia and the New Muslim States," *Caspian Crossroads Magazine* 1, no. 2, 1995, accessed online at <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/usazerb/casp.htm> (March 15, 2006).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Robert O. Freedman, "Russia and the Middle East: The Primakov Era," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 2, no. 2 (May 1998), [http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/meria/meria598\\_freedman.html](http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/meria/meria598_freedman.html) (March 7, 2005).

10 billion over a five-year period. It appears that the items contained in this contract stemmed from their 1989 agreement to sell arms; included were three Kilo class submarines, T-72 tanks, MiG 29 and Su-24 Aircraft, missile launchers, and long-range guns. The second aspect of these contracts focused on Russia's commitment to continue assisting Iran in the development of its steel and petroleum industries. Third, they signed an agreement to create a joint economic commission to encourage further economic ties. Finally, Iran reaffirmed its intent to approach Transcaucasia and Central Asian states "through the Moscow door" and not to promote Islamic radicalism there.<sup>87</sup> Once again, Iran reaffirmed its desire to be a good neighbor.

### **1. Disjointed Policies and Business**

President Yeltsin's desire to reform the Russian economy was reflected in much of his foreign policy. As previously mentioned, he wanted to improve his relations with the West, in addition to maintaining relations with Iran. Even though the United States criticized Yeltsin for selling arms to Iran, the Russian economy was in dire need of hard currency and Iran, more than any other nation in the Middle East, had it to give. In fact, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev visited the Gulf Cooperation Council in April 1992, and stated, "We have created a huge military-industrial complex. And now we need to find profitable markets for selling Russian armaments." He went on to state that "[w]e had to assert ourselves in the region, to show that Russia remains a great power that is prepared to engage in mutually beneficial cooperation, that it is not standing there with an outstretched hand."<sup>88</sup> The bottom line is that the Russians discovered that selling arms was a very lucrative business and could generate the hard currency needed back home. As President Yeltsin tried to find a delicate balance between Iran and the West, his critics back home attacked him for being too pro-West and wanted him to take a more independent policy towards the Middle East.<sup>89</sup>

On the surface, President Yeltsin's decision to invade Chechnya in December 1994 would have appeared to arouse an Iranian response similar to that of Afghanistan. While Iran did react to the poor treatment of Muslims, its was a weak response that

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<sup>87</sup> Shearman, 273.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 274-275.

<sup>89</sup> Freedman, "Russia and Iran: A Tactical Alliance."

seemed to indicate either a respect for Russia's internal affairs, or a more pressing desire not to damage relations with Moscow. In fact, it probably had a lot to do with Moscow's 1993 promise to sell nuclear reactors to Iran, which would satisfy a long-term desire to obtain nuclear technology.<sup>90</sup> In January 1995, Russia did sign a contract to install an \$800 million nuclear reactor in Iran's Bushehr province.<sup>91</sup> This was a hot topic during the May 1995 Clinton – Yeltsin Summit held in Moscow. Although President Clinton vehemently opposed the nuclear proliferation aspect of this contract, Yeltsin would not back down on his commitment to sell nuclear technology to Iran. Yeltsin's other motive was to use his strategic relationship with Iran to counter NATO's Eastward expansion.<sup>92</sup>

President Yeltsin's defiant position in response to Western pressure gained him a political victory in Moscow, while affirming Russia's commitment to maintain closer relations with Iran. It must be noted that Yeltsin did make some serious concessions to the West, as evident in a Heritage Foundation report that states:

Vice President Al Gore and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin on June 30, 1995, signed a confidential agreement that was supposed to limit Moscow's sales of arms to Iran. Russia agreed to supply only weapons specified under the 1989 Soviet-Iranian military agreements and promised not to deliver advanced conventional or "destabilizing" weapons to Iran. Finally, Russia agreed not to sell any weapons to Iran beyond December 31, 1999.<sup>93</sup>

Although this appeared to affect Russian – Iranian relations, Russia's pullout from Chechnya in 1996, and the 1997 delivery of three Kilo class submarines and other arms that had been sold to Iran in 1992, seemed to negate any potential fallout.<sup>94</sup>

## **2. Trouble at Home**

As the 1990s drew to a close, Russian – Iranian relations remained strong due to their economic ties, even though disagreements occurred. Muhammad Khatami's election as the President of Iran in May 1997 did affect their relations when he attempted

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<sup>90</sup> Freedman, "Russian-Iranian Relations in the 1990s."

<sup>91</sup> Ali A. Jalali, "The Strategic Partnership of Russia and Iran," *Parameters* (Winter 2001-2002), <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/01winter/jalali.htm> (March 10, 2005).

<sup>92</sup> Freedman, "Russian-Iranian Relations in the 1990s."

<sup>93</sup> Ariel Cohen and James Phillips, "Countering Russian-Iranian Military Cooperation," April 5, 2001, accessed online at: <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/BG1425.cfm> (February 7, 2005).

<sup>94</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: Arms and Technology Acquisitions," *CRS Report for Congress*, 4 (January 26, 2001) <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/pdf/npp/iranarmsjan2001.pdf> (March 6, 2005).

to open up dialogue with the United States. This was not something Moscow needed, especially when the 1998 economic crisis hit. Russia knew it needed economic assistance from the West, but could not risk losing its economic foothold in the Middle East.<sup>95</sup> Complicating matters further, Russia invaded Chechnya once again in 1999 to put an end to terrorist activities and Islamic extremism. This time, however, Iran stepped up its public criticism as the intensity of the conflict escalated. In a public statement, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman expressed Iran's displeasure as follows:

The Islamic Republic of Iran, while honoring Russia's territorial integrity, does not regard violent and hostile acts as a suitable way of dealing with recent incidents in Chechnya and Daghestan. The government and people of Iran cannot but deplore the continued armed operation by the Russian troops in the Northern Caucasus.<sup>96</sup>

In response, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov "politely" responded by saying, "[w]e are concerned over the attitude of Islamic countries to the events in Chechnya. However, it is a domestic Russian problem, and we intend to settle it independently, without any aid or interference."<sup>97</sup> While Iran publicly acknowledged the injustice to Muslims abroad, it needed good relations with Moscow to ensure completion of the Bushehr nuclear reactor sometime after 2000. Russia, on the other hand, had reasserted itself and defied interference in its domestic affairs.

#### **D. 2000–2005: FULL SPEED AHEAD**

Russian – Iranian relations would take a turn for the better at the end of 1999 when Vladimir Putin succeeded Boris Yeltsin as Russia's President. Putin's actions were very clear and he obviously intended to maintain his close relationship with Iran. While Yeltsin's relations with Iran were politically motivated, Putin chose to emphasize relations as more of an economic business venture.<sup>98</sup> In addition, Putin also acknowledged that greater cooperation with the West would be necessary as he pursued better economic relations with Iran and the international community.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Freedman, "Russian-Iranian Relations in the 1990s."

<sup>96</sup> RFE/RL Reports, "Russia Answers Iran on North Caucasus," 2, no. 41 (October 18, 1999), <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/1999/10/41-181099.asp> (March 2, 2005).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (Cornwall: Blackwell Publishing, LTD, 2003), 64.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 122.

## 1. Putin's New Direction

In November 2000, President Putin made a significant step to boost Russia's relations with Iran by renouncing the 1995 Gore – Chernomyrdin Agreement not to sell conventional arms to Iran.<sup>100</sup> This paved the way for Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev to visit Teheran in December 2000 to discuss resuming the sale of arms. This trip was significant in that it was the first time a Russian Defense Minister had visited Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Over a ten-year period, Sergeev and his Iranian counterpart discussed arms sales valued at more than three billion dollars. In addition, Sergeev dismissed Western pressure by indicating that Russia would conduct its affairs as a means to accomplish its own ends.<sup>101</sup>

Following Sergeev's visit to Teheran, Iranian President Khatami accepted Putin's offer and made an official visit to Moscow in March 2001. Of particular importance, Khatami indicated his desire to purchase more diesel-powered submarines to boost his naval power in the Gulf.<sup>102</sup> In addition, he expressed interest in acquiring TOR-M1 surface-to-air missiles and might be interested in purchasing an additional nuclear reactor.<sup>103</sup> While this was good news to the Russians, the West was critical. For the Russians, it was purely a matter of economics, at least on the surface. They inherited a large arms industry from the Soviet Union and planned to use the sales revenue to reinvest in advanced technology.

Russia faced other events in 2001 that affected its foreign relations. The first event was the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S. World Trade Centers and Pentagon. In spite of his differences with the West, Putin reached out and embraced the American call to support a coalition against terrorism.<sup>104</sup> In some ways, this placed Russia in a precarious situation, since the U.S. had labeled Iran as a member of the "axis

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<sup>100</sup> Gabriel Gorodetsky, ed. *Russia Between East and West: Russian Foreign Policy on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 160.

<sup>101</sup> Cohen and Phillips, "Countering Russian-Iranian Military Cooperation."

<sup>102</sup> Jalali, "The Strategic Partnership of Russia and Iran."

<sup>103</sup> Cohen and Phillips, "Countering Russian-Iranian Military Cooperation."

<sup>104</sup> Rick Fawn, ed. *Realignments of Russian Foreign Policy* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 32.

of evil” due to its sponsorship of international terrorism.<sup>105</sup> Though he did not give into Western pressure, Putin did try to work a delicate balance with Russia’s relations to the West and Iran.<sup>106</sup> The second event was when Russia “officially” ceased operations in Chechnya and began pulling out its troops in December 2001, which was a welcomed move in Teheran due to ill treatment of Muslims.

## **2. The Economic Link**

In terms of economic cooperation, the Caspian Sea is source of friction and a region of great importance for Russia and Iran. In April 2002, Turkmenistan hosted the first summit of the Caspian nations to reconcile differences on how to divide resources between the five bordering nations.<sup>107</sup> Although Presidents Putin and Khatami were both present, the summit did not produce a meaningful agreement. Iran shares only 13 percent of the Caspian’s shoreline, yet proposed equal division of the Caspian to the five adjoining nations, giving 20 percent to each nation. Russia, on the other hand, proposed a division based on shoreline boundaries. Despite this difference, Putin stated that “Russia's relations with Iran have strengthened” and that “Russia decided to participate in the Caspian summit after he talked to the Iranian leader during Khatami's recent visit to Moscow.”<sup>108</sup> In 2005, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan accepted Russia’s proposal.<sup>109</sup> Without a full consensus, it is unlikely that Russia, Iran, or the other three bordering nations will fully unlock the vast resources of the Caspian.<sup>110</sup>

In May 2004, Russian, Iranian, and Azerbaijani railway executives signed an agreement to build the Kazvin-Resht-Astara rail link to connect their countries. In addition, Russia pledged to build a railway through Azerbaijan and Iran that would

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<sup>105</sup> George W. Bush, U.S. President, “State of the Union Address,” January 29, 2002, accessed online at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html> (January 10, 2006).

<sup>106</sup> Andrew Jack, *Inside Putin’s Russia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 260.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>108</sup> RFE/RL, “Turkmenistan: Putin, Khatami Meet On Sidelines Of Summit,” April 24, 2002, accessed online at: <http://www.rferl.org/features/2002/04/24042002014720.asp> (March 8, 2005).

<sup>109</sup> Ria Novosti, “Caspian Legal Status: Most Difficult Questions Remain,” May 17, 2005, accessed online at: <http://en.rian.ru/world/20050517/40370632.html> (March 21, 2006).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 264-266.

connect Russia to the Persian Gulf. This rail link is expected to rival shipments through the Suez Canal and generate \$10 billion in revenues that would be shared primarily between Russia and Iran.<sup>111</sup>

While their economic ties have steadily improved, Russia's construction of the Bushehr nuclear reactor stands out as the capstone element of cooperation between Russia and Iran for 2005, and also the source of friction with the West. During the Bratislava Summit on February 24, 2005, President Putin met President Bush and reiterated his steadfast position on selling nuclear reactors to Iran. On February 27, Russia signed an agreement with Iran to provide nuclear fuel for the Bushehr reactor under the condition that the spent nuclear fuel is returned to Russia. The added safeguard of reclaiming spent nuclear fuel was to alleviate Western concerns that Iran could use it to build a nuclear weapon, and to keep the agreement legal in accordance with the NPT.<sup>112</sup> Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamad Reza Asefi, when responding to a question later the same day about Putin's comment that Iran should not get a nuclear weapon, said, "It is not a new stance. Officials of the Islamic Republic have frequently announced that there is no room for nuclear weapons in Iran's defense doctrine."<sup>113</sup> Thus, in its statements and actions, Iran has shown no open hostility towards Russia and continues to honor its agreement to act as good neighbors.

Despite strong criticism from the West, Russia's demonstrated its commitment to strengthen relations with Iran by signing a one billion dollar defense contract on December 2, 2005. In this agreement, Russia agreed to sell Tor-M1 Air Defense Systems to Iran.<sup>114</sup> It is important to point out that this deal came at a time of increased international tension over Iran's nuclear program. As members of the IAEA continue to

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<sup>111</sup> Sergei Blagov, "Russia Insists on Economic Partnership with Iran," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 2, no. 38, (February 24, 2005), accessed online at: [http://www.jamestown.org/publications\\_details.php?volume\\_id=407&issue\\_id=3241&article\\_id=2369315](http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=407&issue_id=3241&article_id=2369315), (March 7, 2005).

<sup>112</sup> "Officials Welcome Nuclear Deal; Some Media More Critical," FMA in English, March 1, 2005, FBIS Document ID: IAF20050302000001.

<sup>113</sup> "Iran: Spokesman Comments on EU Nuclear Talks, Russian Accord, Al-Qa'ida Arrests," *Teheran IRNA* (Internet Version-WWW) in English, February 27, 2005, Open Source Center Document ID: IAP200502270000069.

<sup>114</sup> Interfax, "Russia to Deliver Arms Worth \$1Bln to Iran – Source," December 2, 2005, [http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/0.html?id\\_issue=11429907](http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/0.html?id_issue=11429907), December 19, 2005. See also, Kommersant, "No Place for Tor," December 5, 2005, <http://www.kommersant.com/doc.asp?id=632411>, December 19, 2005.



press the Iranian nuclear portfolio towards the United Nations Security Council, both this and the Bushehr nuclear reactor contract will make it difficult for Russia to agree to any kind of meaningful sanctions due to its economic interest in Iran.

## **E. SUMMARY ANALYSIS**

After evaluating Russia's relations with Iran since 1953, it is evident that Russia places a great deal of emphasis on maintaining friendly relations with Iran. This was extremely important during the Cold War and is equally important today. In the eyes of the United States, Iran is openly hostile, a supporter of international terrorism, and is trying to acquire nuclear weapons. If Russia subscribed to this view, then its nuclear cooperation with Iran would not seem logical. However, Russia does not openly share the United States' position and does not view its nuclear cooperation with Iran as a threat. What explains this difference? According to Robert Jervis' theory of international politics, Russia's threat perceptions shaped its views and actions toward Iran. In addition, Jervis argues that perceptions are formed through decision makers' learning during "key events in international history."<sup>115</sup> If Jervis is right, and this thesis claims that he is, then Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran can be explained through key events in their state-to-state relations.

What has Russia and its leaders learned in their relations with Iran? First, Russia has learned that economic cooperation equates to political influence, and political influence equates to security. Russian policy makers' views of Iran were shaped by the good business relationship that began during the Cold War and sustained them through periods of extreme tension, particularly after the Islamic Revolution. After their rapprochement in 1989, Russia's economic relationship with Iran has taken off and shows no immediate signs of faltering, as evident in their nuclear cooperation. Regarding Russia's future plans toward Iran, Vladimir Orlov states that "Russia is serious about a more energetic development of its economic and strategic relations with Iran." He further added that "[p]artnership with Iran is becoming one of the key foreign policy tasks of Russia."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions*, 217.

<sup>116</sup> Vladimir A. Orlov, "Iran's Nuclear Program Implications for the Dialogue Among Russia, the United States, and Europe," *PONARS Policy Memo* 358 (November 2004), 3.

Second, Russia has learned that Iran holds a geo-strategic position that is just as important now as it was during the Cold War. Although the breakup of the Soviet Union may have carved up the empire, it did not reduce Russia's self-image as a great power. Russia has struggled to regain this position in the international community and has learned that its relationship with Iran is important. As Russia balanced East against West during the Cold War, it was important for Iran to be on Russia's side, and the same is true today. While Western powers continue their attempts to isolate and influence Iran, they are increasingly turning to Russia for assistance due to Moscow's good relations with Teheran. This ultimately boosts Russia's bargaining position in the global arena. However, Russia also realizes that if it turns away from cooperating with Iran's nuclear program, then another country, possibly the United States, might fill the vacuum – just as the United States did during the Cold War. Russia has a lot at stake in maintaining relations with Iran and is not likely to accept any agreements at the IAEA or the United Nations Security Council that will permanently damage this relationship.

Third, Russia has learned that Iran, in spite of its occasional hostile rhetoric, has shown only peaceful intentions towards Russia. Even at the height of the Cold War, Iran's troops were not aligned against Russia, but were instead oriented towards the Gulf to satisfy the Shah's desire to be a regional power. This peaceful perception of Iran has shaped Russia's desire to cooperate in the nuclear energy field. Russia is committed to nonproliferation and has no desire to see Iran acquire a nuclear weapon any more than the United States does. Commenting on Russia's position on nuclear proliferation, Dmitri Trenin stated,

On the whole, the priority of the nuclear proliferation threat to Russia is lower than it is for the United States. The only recent period in which this threat was regarded as acute came at the time of the break-up of the USSR, when Moscow actively joined forces with Washington (or vice versa) to achieve full denuclearization of the three post-Soviet states which had nuclear forces deployed on their territory (Ukraine, Kazakstan and Belarus). Once this was achieved by 1994, the sense of urgency largely dissipated.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Nuclear Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Environment," *Proliferation Papers* (Autumn 2005), 27-28, accessed online at: [http://www.ifri.org/files/Securite\\_defense/prolif\\_12\\_Trenin.pdf](http://www.ifri.org/files/Securite_defense/prolif_12_Trenin.pdf) (March 21, 2006).

Simply said, Russia's friendly relations with Iran shaped its threat perceptions toward nuclear proliferation. This is why Russia does not appear overly concerned about its nuclear cooperation with Iran. To Russia, Iran has not let ideology (i.e. support for terrorism) get in the way of business and development (it has not been linked in Russian minds with support of terrorist attacks in Russia or Chechnya the way it has in U.S. minds).

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## **IV. U.S. – IRANIAN RELATIONS: 1953-2005**

The United States has been increasingly concerned about Iran's nuclear ambitions and does not share Russia's optimistic view that Iran's civilian nuclear program is strictly for peaceful purposes. As discussed in Chapter III, Russia has a large economic stake in Iran's nuclear program and has provided nuclear technology and assistance to the Bushehr nuclear reactor since January 1995. In terms of economic cooperation, Russia's relations with Iran have markedly improved since 1989. On the other hand, the United States has not had good relations with Iran since the student-led embassy takeover on November 4, 1979. Although this event seriously degraded U.S. – Iran relations, it does not explain the current difference between U.S. and Russian views of Iran's nuclear program. So what actually accounts for their differences? Similar to that of Chapter III, the logic of Robert Jervis is used to explore the “key events in international history” that have shaped U.S. threat perceptions of Iran.<sup>118</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to explain why the United State's threat perceptions of Iran and its nuclear program are so different from those expressed by Russia. Using Jervis' theory on how threat perceptions are formed, this chapter analyzes U.S. – Iranian relations from 1953 to 2005 by focusing on the relations with regard to economic, nuclear, and strategic interests. By analyzing the United States' past and present relations with Iran, this chapter provides the second part of the framework to help explain the two superpowers' different threat perceptions of Iran. By understanding these differences, U.S. policy-makers may be able to devise a better plan of engagement to curtail Iran's nuclear ambitions.

### **A. 1953–1979: BALANCING WEST AGAINST EAST**

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower was inaugurated as the thirty-fourth President of the United States on January 20, 1953, he set in motion an administration that changed the course of history in U.S. – Iran relations. Eisenhower quickly assessed Iran's strategic importance and was not about to let this oil-rich nation fall into the hands of the Communists. Administration officials were clearly aware that the Communist

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<sup>118</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 217.

Tudeh Party was active in Iran and that Prime Minister Muhammad Mussadiq's nationalist policies might play into their hands. After carefully weighing all options, administration officials met on June 25 and authorized a coup to remove Prime Minister Mussadiq from power and replace him with a pro-Western regime. On August 22, Iran had a new Prime Minister, Ardeshir Zahedi, to lead the government, and a grateful Muhammad Reza Shah back on the throne.<sup>119</sup> While the coup itself did eliminate the immediate threat of a Communist takeover, it would have far-reaching consequences on U.S. – Iran relations for years to come.<sup>120</sup>

The United States tailored its support to meet the two threats it perceived Iran still faced: domestic unrest and a potential Soviet invasion.<sup>121</sup> Prime Minister Zahedi understood these concerns, as did the Shah, and quickly worked to stabilize the government. He wrote to President Eisenhower on August 26 and requested immediate financial assistance to renew the Iranian treasury, depleted during Mussadiq's oil face off with the British. Although Eisenhower responded with a \$45 million emergency grant, it soon became apparent that further economic concessions would be linked to acceptable behavior by the new government.<sup>122</sup>

Zahedi and the Shah also took aggressive actions to eliminate the Communist Tudeh influence by arresting, jailing, trying, and executing party members, effectively forcing the Tudeh underground until the time of the revolution.<sup>123</sup> To further promote security, the United States sent a military advisor to Iran to help create an internal security agency that was later known as the SAVAK.<sup>124</sup> This step was taken to ensure the Westward-leaning government remained in power to balance against the Soviet threat. As a friendly gesture, Vice President Richard Nixon made an official visit to Iran in December 1953, and was highly impressed by what he saw. In particular, he

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<sup>119</sup> James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1988), 86-91.

<sup>120</sup> Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1985), 7.

<sup>121</sup> Nikki R. Keddie and Mark J. Gasiorowski, eds., *Neither East Nor West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 146.

<sup>122</sup> Bill, 113-114. The Foreign Operations Administration also provided Iran with a technical grant of \$23.4 million a few days before Eisenhower's offer.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 98-100.

<sup>124</sup> Keddie and Gasiorowski, 150.

discovered that the Shah shared U.S. security concerns and was willing to aid the United States in opposing Soviet ambitions in the Gulf. More importantly, Nixon created a personal friendship with the Shah that would solidify U.S. – Iran relations for over two decades.<sup>125</sup>

Shortly after the coup was over, the United States pressured the Shah to resolve the oil dispute that had precipitated Mussadiq's demise. After lengthy negotiations, Iran finally came to an agreement with the international oil consortium, composed of U.S., French, and British oil companies, in August 1954, and reluctantly agreed to a 50-50 profit split. Many Iranians were unhappy with this agreement, yet the Iranian Parliament ratified it in September, and it went into effect on October 29. Coincidentally, the United States approved the next economic aid installment of \$127 million on November 2, after the first oil tanker left the port.<sup>126</sup> From the United States' perspective, settling the oil dispute represented an important step in curbing domestic unrest, which it perceived as the primary threat to Iran's internal security. By resuming oil exports, Iran could generate the revenue it needed to stabilize the government and take care of domestic issues.

With the oil crisis resolved, the United States turned its attention to curbing the threat of intervention from Iran's northern neighbor, the Soviet Union. This would later serve as a source of contention between the two nations. The United States perceived the Soviet Union as more of a regional threat to the Gulf and did not think an invasion likely. On the other hand, the Shah had first-hand experience of Soviet occupation during World War II, and of Soviet encroachment in Azerbaijan. The Soviets periodically reminded him that they would return, as authorized under the provision of a 1921 treaty, if they felt their Southern boundary was threatened. These personal experiences fueled the Shah's obsession to create a large standing army, a policy that would later put him at odds with the United States. Consequently, the United States wanted Iran to take part in a collective security arrangement that would negate the requirement for a large standing army, and pushed the Shah to join the British-sponsored Baghdad Pact, along with Iraq,

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<sup>125</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, 7-8.

<sup>126</sup> Barry M. Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 95. See also, James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 108-109, 114-115.

Turkey, and Pakistan. After weighing all of his options, the Shah decided to “officially” declare Iran’s pro-Western tilt by signing the Baghdad Pact on November 3, 1955, even though he wanted a better security commitment from the United States.<sup>127</sup>

### **1. Line in the Sand**

The United States later added a security guarantee on November 29, 1956, by declaring that any threat to the territorial integrity of the pact members would be viewed as a grave concern. The spread of Arab nationalism throughout the Middle East led to growing U.S. fears of Communist expansion, which made the timing of this statement even more important. President Eisenhower followed up on this guarantee in a speech to Congress on January 5, 1957, which became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. In his speech, Eisenhower requested Congress authorize:

The United States to cooperate with and assist any nation or group of nations in the general area of the Middle East in the development of economic strength dedicated to the maintenance of national independence....The Executive to undertake in the same region programs of military assistance and cooperation with any nation or group of nations which desires such aid....Such assistance and cooperation to include the employment of the armed forces of the United States to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid, against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism.<sup>128</sup>

Congress approved Eisenhower’s request on March 9, 1957. In doing so, the United States laid the foundation for U.S. support and assistance to Iran over the next few years.

Iran’s timely acceptance of the Eisenhower Doctrine brought about increased guarantees of U.S. economic aid and military assistance. In January 1958, Secretary of State John Dulles visited Iran, followed by the Shah’s June to July visit to the United States where he tried to secure U.S. business investment in Iran. During the Shah’s visit, a bloody coup started in Iraq on July 14, leading to Iraq’s eventual withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact. The remaining members of the pact retained their agreements, but changed its name to the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Ultimately, the Iraqi coup and increased Soviet presence in Iraq caused the United States to think more

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<sup>127</sup> Bill, 116-117. See also, Rubin, 96-97.

<sup>128</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, U.S. President, “Special Message to the Congress on the situation in the Middle East,” January 5, 1957, <http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/mideast.htm> (March 2, 2006).



seriously about providing military assistance to Iran and accelerate its provisions of economic aid. As a result, the United States' Secretaries of Defense and Treasury were sent to Iran in October 1958 to discuss further U.S. assistance.<sup>129</sup>

As the 1950s drew to a close, the strategic relationship between the United States and Iran solidified. On March 5, 1959, the United States signed a bilateral defense agreement with the members of CENTO including Iran, going against pressure from the Soviets for Iran to remain neutral. The intent of this agreement was to provide the Shah with a U.S. security guarantee to counter-balance Soviet actions in the Middle East, and to allay the Shah's desire for a large Iranian military. Based on this concept, military strategists concluded that a defensive posture was the best option for Iran, since even a large army was deemed an inadequate match for the Soviets. To demonstrate U.S. resolve for Iran's defense, President Eisenhower made a good will visit on December 14. During his short visit, Eisenhower addressed Iran's Parliament and reiterated his commitment to Iran's defense, but also indicated a subtle change in policy:

Though militarily we in America devote huge sums to make certain of the security of ourselves and to assist our allies, we do not forget that--in the long term--military strength alone will not bring about peace with justice. The spiritual and economic health of the free world must be likewise strengthened.<sup>130</sup>

While his security commitment would remain, Eisenhower hinted at a curtailment in U.S. military assistance, since he still viewed the domestic situation as Iran's greatest threat.<sup>131</sup> Eisenhower's hoped that, in curtailing military aid, the Shah would turn his attention to improving Iran's economy and social base, and less on his military budget.

In the early 1960s, lawmakers began to question the amount of military and economic aid that the United States was sending to Iran. With widespread reports of corruption and mismanagement, they were concerned that the Shah was not using the money to alleviate its growing problem of domestic and political unrest.<sup>132</sup> The United

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<sup>129</sup> Bill, 117-119.

<sup>130</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, U.S. President, "Address to the Members of the Parliament of Iran," December 14, 1959, accessed online at [http://www.parstimes.com/history/eisenhower\\_iran\\_parliament.html](http://www.parstimes.com/history/eisenhower_iran_parliament.html) (March 2, 2006).

<sup>131</sup> Ruben, 101-102. See also, Bill 119-120.

<sup>132</sup> Keddie and Gasiorowski, 152.

States provided Iran with over \$1 billion in aid, most in the form of a grant, between 1953 and 1960; \$567 million of this was economic and \$450 million in military aid to sustain Iran's government and improve its economy.<sup>133</sup> Although Iran's economy showed signs of improvement with oil profits increasing from \$90 million in 1955 to \$482 million in 1964, the government accumulated a large amount of debt through various international loans.<sup>134</sup> While U.S. aid and assistance had allowed the Shah to build up his armed forces at the expense of resolving domestic issues, it led to a growing perception that the United States supported the Shah's actions and did not care about its people.<sup>135</sup>

## **2. Coercive Reform**

After the Kennedy Administration took office in January 1961, the situation in Iran quickly became a priority. President Kennedy learned of a conversation in which Premier Khrushchev said a non-Communist revolution was imminent due to the repressive government of the Shah and domestic instability. It is for this very reason that U.S. officials had long been pushing the Shah to pursue domestic and political reforms instead of a military modernization program. Similar to 1953, administration officials perceived continued domestic unrest as an open door to Communist expansion. To rectify this problem, Kennedy decided to curtail military aid and increase economic aid to Iran to pressure the Shah to initiate reforms.<sup>136</sup> The Shah had requested greater military assistance during his April 1962 visit to the United States, but Kennedy made it clear that this was only possible if Iran's domestic situation improved. While Vice President Johnson visited Teheran, from August 24–26, to reiterate Kennedy's policies and to offer reassurances of U.S. support, he gained a favorable impression of the Shah as a capable head of state and trusted ally of the United States in opposing Communism.<sup>137</sup>

The aftermath of these visits caused the Shah to reevaluate his actions. First, it forced him to undertake an aggressive domestic reform program, comprised primarily of land reforms, which he later dubbed the White Revolution so it would not have any

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<sup>133</sup> Bill, 114.

<sup>134</sup> Ruben, 96.

<sup>135</sup> Bill, 129.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 132-133.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 139-141.

Communist overtones. Kennedy was pleased with its progress and viewed it as a step in the right direction. The down side of these reforms was that the Shah's violent repression of peaceful demonstrations would later fuel Ayatollah Khomeini's anti-Shah and anti-American campaign, and ultimately the revolutionary fervor to topple his regime.<sup>138</sup> Second, it convinced the Shah that he needed to seek rapprochement with the Soviets, since he was not confident about the future state and level of U.S. assistance.<sup>139</sup> On September 15, 1962, the Shah appeased the Soviets by stating that U.S. nuclear missiles would not be permitted on Iranian soil and agreeing to sign a nonaggression pact. This allowed the Shah to pursue a dual-natured foreign policy and use Soviet leverage to gain influence in Washington.<sup>140</sup>

After Johnson took over the Presidency following Kennedy's November 1963 assassination, the tone of U.S. – Iran relations would turn back to Iran's favor. The Shah gained a \$200 million loan to purchase military equipment in October 1964, after convincing the Majlis to approve a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) for U.S. military personnel and advisors.<sup>141</sup> Shortly thereafter, President Johnson became consumed with the Vietnam War, which took pressure off of Iran's domestic situation. In addition, as U.S. reliance on Middle East oil increased, Johnson apparently recalled his earlier impression of the Shah and was pleased that Iran had a stable monarch on its throne at a time when the rest of the Middle East was in turmoil. This was particularly evident when Israel overcame Nasser's advances in 1967 during the Six Day War. This event signified to Johnson that there was great utility in arming smaller, friendly nations in the Middle East. In November 1967, the United States promised to supply Iran with two full squadrons of advanced F-4 aircraft, satisfying the Shah's desire for high-tech weaponry. However, it must be noted that the Shah had essentially threatened to purchase military equipment from the Soviets if the U.S. did not sell what he wanted.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, 10-12.

<sup>139</sup> Sicker, 92-93.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 93-101.

<sup>141</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 148.

<sup>142</sup> Rubin, 115-123.

### 3. The Regional Boss and His Fall

When President Nixon took office in January 1969, the relationship between the United States and Iran began to take on a new strategic meaning.<sup>143</sup> Nixon's focus was to get the United States out of the Vietnam War and prevent similar usage of U.S. troops. During a July 25 stop-over in Guam, he gave a speech and announced what would later become known as the "Nixon Doctrine." In this speech, he changed U.S. foreign policy by stating that "threatened nations would [now] have to supply their own fighting manpower, even when the U.S. supported them."<sup>144</sup> The Shah was pleased with this announcement and later traveled to Washington in October to meet with his old friend Richard Nixon, now President of the United States. At the conclusion of this meeting, the Shah felt he was given the go-ahead to pursue his own interests in the Persian Gulf, after having convinced Washington that local forces posed a greater threat to the regime than did the Soviets.<sup>145</sup> His only stipulation was a repeated request for increased military sales and assistance to counter such threats.

The Shah's dreams finally came true during President Nixon's May 30-31, 1972 visit to Teheran. During this visit, President Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger came to a monumental agreement with the Shah that Iran would assume the role as a "regional protector" of the Gulf and of Western interests. In return, the United States would make available to the Shah virtually every weapon in the United States' inventory, other than nuclear weapons. They also agreed to significantly increase the number of U.S. military advisors and assistants to train the Iranian armed forces.<sup>146</sup> Nixon's strategic decision to place U.S. interests in the Gulf under the Shah's protection was more than likely shaped by his earlier perception of the Shah during his first trip to Iran in 1953, a view consistent with Jervis' Delayed Impact on Policy proposition. This proposition basically means that early experiences can form a strong impression on an individual, but it may be years before the individual is in a position to effect policy.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ruben, 115-123.

<sup>144</sup> Tom Wicker, *One of US: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1991), 581.

<sup>145</sup> Ruben, 124-125.

<sup>146</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, 13-14.

<sup>147</sup> Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 260-261.

The only problem is that this earlier perception may have given Nixon an incorrect assessment of the Shah's current ability to protect U.S. interests in the Gulf, and possibly led to a policy precedent that set the Carter Administration up for failure.

It is also important to note that the Shah's nuclear ambitions were becoming just as intense as his desire for military hardware. In 1970, Iran ratified the NPT and thus became eligible to receive nuclear technology and assistance, a measure that paved the way for U.S. contracts in 1974 to build nuclear power plants and provide nuclear fuel. This agreement was followed by subsequent agreements with Germany and France, in 1976 and 1977 respectively.<sup>148</sup> While such assistance is authorized under the NPT, in 1975 the Shah stated, "if ever a country [of this region] comes out and wants to acquire atomic weapons, Iran must also possess such atomic bombs."<sup>149</sup> It is quite possible that the Shah truly had ulterior motives for his nuclear program, but it did not change Western threat perceptions or prevent Western countries from cooperating with his regime. In fact, "Iran's nuclear program was considered one of the most advanced in the Middle East" in January 1979, at the time of the Islamic Revolution.<sup>150</sup>

Toward the mid-1970s, the relationship between the United States and Iran began to reach an unprecedented level. The only real complaint the United States had was high oil prices, which had quadrupled in 1973, but were justified as fair by the Shah. After the Shah's July 1973 trip to the United States, the groundwork was laid to create a joint economic commission to significantly expand commercial trade in all areas. By 1975, U.S. estimates anticipated commercial ties could reach as high as \$26 billion over the next six years. On the military side, Iran's purchase of military equipment between 1972 and 1977 was \$16.2 billion. This was an unprecedented figure, since U.S. military grant aid to Iran from 1950 to 1970 was only valued at \$1.8 billion. By 1977, Iran's defense budget totaled \$9.4 billion and accounted for 40 percent of the country's annual budget.<sup>151</sup> It must be noted that the ultimate cost of this economic policy came at the

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<sup>148</sup> Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Iran: Nuclear Overview," available at: [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/profiles/Iran/1819.html](http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Iran/1819.html) (March 6, 2006).

<sup>149</sup> Lewis A. Dunn, *Controlling the Bomb: Nuclear Proliferation in the 1980s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 63.

<sup>150</sup> Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Iran: Nuclear Overview."

<sup>151</sup> Bill, 202-204. See also, Ruben, 128.

expense, exploitation, and repression of the Iranian people, a condition that would later resurface and forever change the course of U.S. – Iran relations.

This was the situation faced by President Jimmy Carter when he took office on January 15, 1977. Carter continued Nixon's policies of arming Iran and was an open advocate of human rights. Although this concerned the Shah at first, Carter's human rights agenda was quickly subsumed within the greater context of a U.S. need for a key ally in the Gulf. This blatant double standard became a rallying point for Ayatollah Khomeini's anti-Shah and anti-U.S. campaign. In its zeal to have Iran as a strategic ally, the United States willingly looked the other way and ignored the deep-rooted domestic problems and human rights abuses in Iran. Coincidentally, the American media had built up the Shah's image for years and rarely issued a negative word about him. Who would expect anything less from the United States' protector in the Gulf? The Shah used this tide of good will to exert a tremendous amount of influence over the United States government by threatening to expand relations with others, such as the Soviets, if his requests were not granted.<sup>152</sup>

As the situation in Iran deteriorated with large-scale riots and unrest, the magnitude of Iran's problem became increasingly clear to U.S. government officials in late 1978. When it was certain that the Shah would leave Iran, Carter even contacted Khomeini and reiterated his desire that the bloodshed stop and asked Khomeini to support Prime Minister Bakhtiar's government. Khomeini refused on the grounds Bakhtiar was too pro-West and later responded by hinting at the future state of U.S. – Iran relations by saying, "If the United States behaves correctly, does not interfere in our affairs and withdraws the advisors who are intervening in our country, we will respect it in return."<sup>153</sup> On January 16, 1979, the Shah departed Iran for Egypt and, soon after, Ayatollah Khomeini arrived from Paris on February 1, an event that ushered in the Islamic Revolution.<sup>154</sup>

Throughout the rest of 1979, the United States continued to work to restore and maintain amicable relations with Iran, but encountered increasing hostility. As the

<sup>152</sup> Bill, 231-232.

<sup>153</sup> Ruben, 240-241.

<sup>154</sup> Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 238-239.

Shah's condition deteriorated, it became clear that he needed advanced medical treatment that was available in the United States. Upon hearing this, President Carter decided to allow the Shah to be flown to New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center on October 22, 1979. Iranians viewed this event with great hostility and saw it as an American plot to restore the Shah back to power. Consequently, a group of pro-Khomeini students stormed the American Embassy and took its occupants hostage on November 4, an act of terror that was blessed by Khomeini. On November 12, President Carter ordered U.S. purchasers to cease buying Iranian oil, followed by the issuance of Executive Order 12170 on November 14, which froze all Iranian assets.<sup>155</sup> Then, on December 4, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 457, and shortly thereafter Resolution 461, which called for Iran to release the hostages and to resolve its differences with the United States.<sup>156</sup>

During the final days of the decade, the future outlook appeared bleak. In a matter of months, the strategic relationship between the United States and Iran had gone from an unparalleled level of economic commitment and trust to a state of political despair, ultimately removing the cornerstone of U.S. Policy in the Middle East. To further exacerbate matters, the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan in December proved that Moscow was willing to use force and the United States could do very little about it.

## **B. 1980–1991: TWO-FACED DIPLOMACY**

In early January 1980, President Carter asked the United Nations to impose economic sanctions on Iran, similar to those implemented by the United States. However, a Soviet veto killed the Security Council resolution on January 13 and handed Carter yet another defeat.<sup>157</sup> Although the Soviets were concerned about Islamic extremism, they welcomed the anti-American aspect of the revolution and believed it would allow them to gain a foothold in Iran. It is likely that President Carter understood

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<sup>155</sup> Warren Christopher and others, *American Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of a Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 93-94. For detailed information on Executive Order 12170, refer to: <http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/legal/eo/12170.pdf>.

<sup>156</sup> UN Resolution 457 and 461, accessed online at, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/370/75/IMG/NR037075.pdf?OpenElement>, March 6, 2006.

<sup>157</sup> Robert Carswell, "Economic Sanctions and the Iran Experience," *Foreign Affairs* 2 (Winter 1981/1982): 247.

this and signaled that U.S. interests in the Gulf would not be undermined in his January 23 State of the Union Address. In what later became known as the “Carter Doctrine,” he stated:

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.<sup>158</sup>

Ultimately, this message implied warnings to both the Soviet Union and Iran, and demonstrated U.S. resolve during the crisis.

On April 7, 1980, President Carter broke diplomatic relations with Iran and asked the Swiss to represent U.S. interests in Iran, and Algeria to represent Iran in the United States. Later that day, he issued Executive Order 12205, which formally placed U.S. economic sanctions on Iran. On April 11, he made a risky executive decision based on time-critical intelligence and ordered a military operation to rescue the hostages. Unfortunately, the rescue mission failed on April 25 and was seen as a humiliating defeat for the United States.<sup>159</sup> Although this made Iran appreciably more defiant, the sanctions began to take their toll after the September 22 Iraqi Invasion of Iran. It soon became clear to Khomeini that Iran lacked the financial resources to continue the war with Iraq; thus, he became increasingly interested in settling the hostage crisis. Even after resolving most of their grievances through the Algiers Accords, Iran purposefully waited until the day that President Carter left office to release the hostages – after 444 days in captivity.<sup>160</sup>

### **1. New Threats, Old Policies**

When President Ronald Reagan took office on January 20, 1981, he inherited a different situation than faced by Carter. The hostage crisis ended the honeymoon of U.S. – Iran relations, and now the Reagan administration faced an increasing threat of Islamic extremism. During the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini rallied the masses to his side in opposition to the Shah; now he pursued the other aspect of the Islamic Revolution and

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<sup>158</sup> Jimmy Carter, U.S. President, “State of the Union Address,” January 23, 1980, accessed online at: <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml> (March 6, 2006).

<sup>159</sup> Christopher, 140-142. For detailed information on Executive Order 12202, refer to: <http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/legal/eo/12205.pdf>.

<sup>160</sup> Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 251-252.



rooted out all traces of Western imperialism, purged the government and military, and implemented Islamic Law. Khomeini also ended Iran's nuclear projects since they relied on and promoted Western technologies and were deemed anti-Islamic.<sup>161</sup> In essence, he eliminated all opposition to his regime and made it clear that Iran planned to export the Islamic Revolution abroad, which the administration viewed as a threat. Although Khomeini initiated a policy of "neither East nor West" regarding the two superpowers, the Soviet Union appeared to be in a much better position to exert influence in Iran, which was something the United States feared.<sup>162</sup>

Reagan initially decided to keep the United States neutral during the Iran – Iraq War. But when it appeared that Iran was getting the upper hand on the Iraqi army in mid-1982, Reagan decided to "tilt" U.S. support towards Iraq, although secretly providing arms and intelligence to Iran.<sup>163</sup> The reason for his two-fold approach was to balance against the Soviet threat in the region and to ensure that the Persian Gulf was not dominated by the Islamic Republic. When Iran was implicated in both the 1983 Marine Barracks bombing and the attempted truck bombing at the United States Embassy in Kuwait, Reagan realized the threat that Islamic extremism now posed to the region and to U.S. interests. Clearly, Khomeini's threat to export the revolution now seemed more realistic and deadly. Reagan promised "swift retribution" against Iran and Syria, but the only real consequence was that the State Department designated Iran as an international sponsor of terrorism on January 24, 1984.<sup>164</sup> In doing so, this prevented Iran from obtaining much-needed arms and from receiving exported dual-use technology.

In the mid-1980s, U.S. threat perceptions regarding Iran diminished slightly. First, Ayatollah Khomeini clamped down on the Communist Tudeh Party in 1983 after discovering cases of Soviet spying and subversion.<sup>165</sup> This was welcomed news to the Reagan administration since it reduced the possibility of Soviet intervention in Iran.

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<sup>161</sup> Joseph Cirincione, Jon B. Wolfsthal, and Miriam Rajkumar, *Deadly Arsenals: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Threats*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2005), 298.

<sup>162</sup> Keddie and Gadjorowski, 14-15.

<sup>163</sup> Gary Sick, "The Clouded Mirror: The United States and Iran, 1979-1999" in *Iran and the Crossroads*, eds. John L. Esposito and R.K. Ramazani (New York: Palgrave Press, 2001), 195.

<sup>164</sup> Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 62-63.

<sup>165</sup> Martin Sicker, *The Bear and the Lion* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 123-126.

Second, Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in the Soviet Union eased the tension in East – West relations. In fact, State Department officials hailed this as a potential turning point between the two superpowers. It was said that "Islamic fundamentalism, not communism, had become the most serious threat to stability in the Middle East and U.S. interests. Thus, Iran, not the Soviet Union, was America's principal concern in the region."<sup>166</sup> This was not to say that the Soviet Union did not possess the military might to oppose the West, but instead, these events lessened the perceptual threat that Moscow posed to Western interests in the Gulf.

## **2. Double Standard**

In the latter part of the 1980s, the United States began to clumsily reassert its presence and credibility in the Gulf. While occasional moves towards rapprochement with Iran were made, U.S. actions were still driven by the need to counter Soviet influence. This happened during the Iran-Contra affair when Washington used questionable tactics to gain influence in Iran. By the time the fiasco was made public in November 1986, the Reagan administration had broken several laws by providing arms to Iran, dealing with terrorists to obtain release of U.S. hostages in Lebanon, and diverting funds to the Contras.<sup>167</sup> Despite being an embarrassment and nearly getting President Reagan impeached, it indicated that rapprochement with Iranian moderates was still possible.

By 1987, the administration changed its policies and took a much more aggressive approach to the Gulf situation. In January 1987, U.S. Secretary of State Shultz continued to reiterate a need for dialogue with Iran and highlighted that both countries shared a strategic interest in containing Communism. However, he also stated, "American interests are directly threatened by the Iranian government's pursuit of its war with Iraq, by its sponsorship of terrorism, and by its collusion with terrorist forces elsewhere in the region."<sup>168</sup> In April, the United States finally agreed to reflag eleven Kuwaiti oil tankers to counter an offer that had been made by the Soviets. This significantly increased the U.S. naval presence in the Gulf and brought the United States into the regional conflict

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<sup>166</sup> Hunter, 64.

<sup>167</sup> Sick, "The Clouded Mirror," 195-196.

<sup>168</sup> Hunter, 67.

between Iran and Iraq. Only this time, the United States visibly sided with Iraq as it protected tankers and reasserted its military dominance through periodic engagements with Iranian forces. To prevent further escalation, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 588 on July 20, 1987, to initiate a cease fire and withdrawal of forces by the two nations or face sanctions; Iran refused to accept the resolution in its entirety.<sup>169</sup> As Iran's belligerence in the Gulf increased, Reagan decided to tighten the reigns and signed Executive Order 12613 on October 30, 1987, banning Iranian imports into the United States.<sup>170</sup> With Iraqi advances and U.S. sanctions taking their toll, Iran finally agreed to accept Resolution 598, and officially ended the war on August 20, 1988. Iran had learned that in weakness it had no bargaining power, which may have prompted Iranian President Rafsanjani to later declare that "[we] shall fully equip ourselves both in the offensive and defensive use of chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons."<sup>171</sup>

### **3. Outstretched Hand**

As the 1980s came to a close, several events occurred that seemed to offer a gleam of hope for amicable relations. During President George Bush's Inaugural Address on January 20, 1989, he held out a prospect for improved relations with Iran by seeking the release of U.S. hostages held by Lebanese Shiite radicals stating,

To the world, too, we offer new engagement and a renewed vow: We will stay strong to protect the peace. The offered hand is a reluctant fist; once made -- strong, and can be used with great effect. There are today Americans who are held against their will in foreign lands and Americans who are unaccounted for. Assistance can be shown here and will be long remembered. Good will begets good will. Good faith can be a spiral that endlessly moves on.<sup>172</sup>

With the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in June, Iranian President Rafsanjani responded to Bush's offer on August 4 and called the new administration "wiser" than that of Reagan. Bush had learned from Reagan's earlier mistake to deal indirectly with Iran, and in this

<sup>169</sup> Hunter, 69-72. See also, Sick, "The Clouded Mirror," 197-198.

<sup>170</sup> Ronald Reagan, U.S. President, "Executive Order 12613--Prohibiting Imports from Iran," (October 30, 1987), accessed online at: <http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/legal/eo/12613.pdf> (March 8, 2006).

<sup>171</sup> Cirincione, Wolfsthal, and Rajkumar, 298.

<sup>172</sup> George W. H. Bush, U.S. President, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1989, accessed online at: <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/papers/1989/89012000.html> (March 8, 2006).

regard Pakistan served as an excellent mediator. The United States had realized the importance of maintaining an open channel of communication to Iran via Pakistan, and all of the hostages were released by December 1991, with only one being killed. Unfortunately, Bush forgot to “remember” Iran’s assistance in the matter, which only proved to Iran that the United States was incapable of keeping its word.<sup>173</sup>

### **C. 1992–1999: THE MIRAGE**

The geo-political situation in the Gulf changed in the early 1990s. Although the threat of Communism was removed with the break-up of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Russia’s interest in Iran was not. In 1989, Russia and Iran took a major step towards rapprochement and began to open up significant areas for economic cooperation. In particular, Russia had signed a major arms deal with Iran and had agreed to cooperate on the “peaceful” use of nuclear technology.<sup>174</sup> This clearly did not help the United States in its efforts to isolate the Islamic regime. With the Soviet threat to Iran now removed from its northern border, it appeared that Washington could do very little to significantly influence Iran’s behavior, barring a military engagement. This fact was clear to Iran as it observed the United Nations’ coalition expel Saddam Hussein’s forces from Kuwait.

#### **1. Tightening the Reigns**

When President Clinton took office in January 1993, he wanted to take a more aggressive approach towards Iran and the Gulf. With the Communist threat removed, there was no longer a need to balance East against West in its relations with Iran or Iraq. Instead, Clinton implemented a policy of “Dual Containment” on both. The intent of this policy is succinctly summed up in the Council on Foreign Relations Task Force Report:

The Clinton administration asserted that it was not trying to change the Iranian regime per se but rather its behavior, particularly its quest for nuclear weapons, its support for terrorism and subversion in the region, and its opposition to the peace process.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Hunter, 75-76.

<sup>174</sup> Islamic Republic News Agency [IRNA] on Communique, June 25, 1989, in FBIS-NES – 89-121, June 26, 1989, 31-33.

<sup>175</sup> Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, *Differentiated Containment: U.S. Policy Toward Iran and Iraq* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997), 6.

Clinton hoped that he could gain support from the international community to tighten restrictions on military sales to Iran, but was unsuccessful in his endeavor. In 1995, the administration learned that Conoco Oil Inc. had signed a \$1 billion contract with Iran to develop a gas field. While this contract was perfectly legal, it violated the principle of dual-containment.<sup>176</sup> As a result, Clinton issued Executive Order 12957 on March 15, 1995, banning U.S. investment in the Iranian oil industry.<sup>177</sup> Shortly thereafter, Clinton imposed a total ban on all Iranian imports, with the exception of media products, and all U.S. exports to Iran, by issuing Executive Order 12959.<sup>178</sup> The enactment of such stringent policies was proof enough of how far U.S. – Iran relations had deteriorated from the late days of the Shah when economic ties alone were expected to reach \$26 billion.

The Clinton administration also tried to pressure the Russians into renouncing a January 1995 contract to install a 1,000 Mega Watt nuclear reactor in Iran's Bushehr region. Russian actions were deemed reckless, especially since there were clear indications that Iran had a clandestine procurement network.<sup>179</sup> Unfortunately, President Yeltsin would not budge. Vice President Gore, however, was able to secure a commitment from Prime Minister Chernomyrdin on June 30 that would stop Russia from selling destabilizing weapons to Iran and prevent further arms agreements beyond December 31, 1999.<sup>180</sup> When Clinton was unable to influence U.S. allies in Europe to sanction Iran, Congressional pressure led to the creation of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), which was unanimously approved and signed into law on August 5, 1996. This act essentially placed sanctions on any foreign company that invested more than \$40

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<sup>176</sup> Sick, "The Clouded Mirror," 198-199.

<sup>177</sup> William J. Clinton, U.S. President, "Executive Order 12957: Prohibiting Certain Transactions with Respect to the Development of Iranian Petroleum Resources," March 15, 1995, accessed online at: <http://clinton6.nara.gov/1995/03/1995-03-15-executive-order-12957-barring-iranian-petroleum-development.html> (March 8, 2006).

<sup>178</sup> William J. Clinton, U.S. President, "Executive Order 12959: Prohibiting Certain Transactions With Respect To Iran," May 6, 1995, accessed online at: <http://clinton6.nara.gov/1995/05/1995-05-06-executive-order-12959-on-iran-trade-ban.html> (March 8, 2006).

<sup>179</sup> Cirincione, Wolfsthal, and Rajkumar, 302-303.

<sup>180</sup> Ali A. Jalali, "The Strategic Partnership of Russia and Iran," *Parameters* (Winter 2001-2002), <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/01winter/jalali.htm> (March 10, 2005).

million into Iran's oil and gas sector.<sup>181</sup> Ultimately, this act was designed to prevent any new sources of foreign investment into Iran's energy sector, which had been closed off since the 1979 Revolution.

The important point to note during the 1990s was the diminishing role that Iran played in U.S. foreign policy. Iran was once the cornerstone of U.S. policy in the Middle East; it protected U.S. interest in the Gulf and significantly helped contain Communism. With the Communist threat removed, however, Iran essentially was pushed to the side. The true interest in Iran was to eliminate the threat it posed to the Middle East Peace Process and to persuade Iran to change its behavior with regard to its support of terrorism and quest for nuclear weapons. Reestablishing diplomatic and economic relations with Iran would have their benefits, but ultimately having a stable non-threatening government in power, even if relations were still severed, was seen as a step in the right direction.

## **2. Chance for Rapprochement**

In May 1997, Seyyed Muhammad Khatami won the presidential election in Iran and the hope for a new era in U.S. – Iran relations emerged. He promoted a more moderate form of foreign policy and opened up dialogue with Saudi Arabia and other nations in the Persian Gulf. But more importantly, he appeared on CNN in January 1998, and praised the American people and their achievements, and even addressed Iran's positions on issues very sensitive to the United States. He essentially condemned acts of terrorism that were not related to liberation movements (a sore spot after the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing), mentioned that Iran would not stand in the way of the Middle East Peace Process since it was expected to fail, and stated that “[we] are not a nuclear power and do not intend to become one.”<sup>182</sup>

The United States viewed Khatami's statements with extreme optimism and, in May, announced it would waive portions of ILSA on the basis of national security, as a measure of good faith and to appease European hostility to it. In June 1998, Secretary of State Madeline Albright replied to Iran's “signs of change” by saying that “[we] are ready

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<sup>181</sup> Sick, “The Clouded Mirror,” 199-200.

<sup>182</sup> Sick, “The Clouded Mirror,” 200-201. See also, Gary Sick, “Iran: Confronting Terrorism,” *The Washington Quarterly* 26 no. 4 (Autumn 2004): 88-89.

to explore further ways to build mutual confidence and avoid misunderstandings.”<sup>183</sup> While the United States did open the opportunity for dialogue, it was rejected by Iran on the basis that meaningful government-to-government dialogue cannot take place until the United States removes all of the sanctions that Iran considers hostile.<sup>184</sup> Consequently, what appeared to be a ray of hope quickly turned into a gridlock as neither side was willing to make needed concessions to open relations.

#### **D. 2000–2005: EMERGING THREAT AND HOSTILE DIPLOMACY**

When the new millennium began, U.S. officials were still holding on to the hope of improving relations with Iran, but were also taking actions to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. On March 14, 2000, President Clinton signed the Iran Nonproliferation Act, “which authorizes him to take punitive action against individuals or organizations known to be providing material aid to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs in Iran.”<sup>185</sup> While Clinton was clamping down on external agencies that were aiding Iran’s nuclear program, Secretary of State Albright was offering a carrot to Iran. On March 17, she gave a speech to the American-Iranian Council and made some key statements and concessions that hinted towards rapprochement. She indicated that U.S. policies towards Iran during its war with Iraq were a little “short-sighted.” As a show of good faith, she eased up on the sanctions a bit and said that Iran could now begin exporting non-oil items like Persian rugs, caviar, and food products such as dried fruits and nuts. In her concluding remarks, she clearly indicated that the United States wanted to improve its relations with Iran.

This morning on behalf of the government and the people of the United States, I call upon Iran to join us in writing a new chapter in our shared history. Let us be open about our differences and strive to overcome them.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Patrick Clawson and others, *Iran Under Khatami: A Political, Economic, and Military Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), 5.

<sup>184</sup> The Atlantic Council of the United States, “Thinking Beyond the Stalemate in U.S.-Iranian Relations: Volume I-Policy Review” (May 2001), 2, accessed online at: [http://www.acus.org/docs/0105-Beyond\\_Stalemate\\_US-Iranian\\_Relations.pdf](http://www.acus.org/docs/0105-Beyond_Stalemate_US-Iranian_Relations.pdf) (March 8, 2006).

<sup>185</sup> Matthew Rice, “Clinton Signs Iran Nonproliferation Act,” *Arms Control Today* 30 no. 3 (April 2000), accessed online at: [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000\\_04/irnap00.asp?print](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000_04/irnap00.asp?print) (March 8, 2006).

<sup>186</sup> Madeline Albright, U.S. Secretary of State, “Remarks before the American-Iranian Council,” March 17, 2000, accessed online at: <http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/2000/000317.html> (March 7, 2006).

The election of President George Bush and the events that ensued would soon set the tone for future dealings with Iran. During his Inaugural Address on January 20, 2001, President Bush provided the direction that would shape the future of U.S. – Iran relations by stating:

We will confront weapons of mass destruction, so that a new century is spared new horrors. The enemies of liberty and our country should make no mistake: America remains engaged in the world by history and by choice, shaping a balance of power that favors freedom. We will defend our allies and our interests.<sup>187</sup>

Shortly thereafter, in February 2001, the president reversed a Clinton policy and reinstated the usage of inflammatory labels like “rogue” to refer to governments, such as Iran, that were seeking weapons of mass destruction.<sup>188</sup> While statements can be used to reach a variety of different audiences, there was a clear change in tone from that of the Clinton Administration.

On June 21, Attorney General Ashcroft issued a report to Congress that implicated Iran in the 1996 Khobar Towers Bombing that killed nineteen American Servicemen.<sup>189</sup> There were no Iranians indicted in the incident, but mentioning Iran was enough to rouse emotions that the Islamic Republic’s intentions were not entirely peaceful. In August, Bush approved a five-year extension to ILSA.<sup>190</sup> Although ILSA’s effectiveness is questionable as far as sanctions go, it was definitely a political signal to Iran that all was not well between the two nations.

### **1. The Eagle Rages**

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Americans were awakened to a new reality, a cold reality that terrorism was real, and it was here. The horrific images of jet airliners crashing into the World Trade Center that were played over and over on the television screens served as a constant reminder that the United States was vulnerable.

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<sup>187</sup> George W. Bush, U.S. President, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 2001, accessed online at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/inaugural-address.html> (March 8, 2006).

<sup>188</sup> Janne E. Nolan, Bernard I. Finel, and Brian D. Finlay, eds., *Ultimate Security: Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction* (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2003), 84.

<sup>189</sup> RFE/RL, “Weapons of Mass Destruction” *Iran Report* 2 no. 24 (June 25, 2001), accessed online at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2001/24-250601.html> (March 8, 2006).

<sup>190</sup> Roger Howard, *Iran In Crisis? Nuclear Ambitions and the American Response* (London: Zed Books, Ltd., 2004), 160.



While the previous World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings served as wakeup calls, these attacks showed the catastrophic damage potential of terrorists who, for no other reason, sought to kill as many Americans as possible and to destroy our economic source of strength. On September 20, 2001, President Bush addressed Congress, the nation, and the world, adding that:

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime....Terror, unanswered, can not only bring down buildings, it can threaten the stability of legitimate governments. And you know what -- we're not going to allow it.<sup>191</sup>

In his words, the real threat posed by terrorism was its potential to bring down “legitimate governments.”

Iran responded to this tragedy by issuing official statements of condolence and support for the American people. In fact, Iran even quietly assisted with humanitarian relief and search and rescue efforts during the United States’ Campaign in Afghanistan. However, after Israel intercepted a ship filled with arms and explosives enroute to Palestine from Iran’s Kish Island, it became increasingly clear that Iran’s true motives towards Israel, a long-time ally of the United States, were not peaceful.<sup>192</sup> In response, President Bush labeled Iran part of the “Axis of Evil” during this January 2002 State of the Union Address.<sup>193</sup> For the most part, relations between the United States and Iran after 9/11 amounted to little more than hostile rhetoric. As the United States prosecuted its Global War on Terror, first with operations in Afghanistan, then the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran typically kept a low profile and avoided outright confrontation with the United States.

## **2. The Crisis Builds**

While Iran’s support for terrorist organizations and its animosity towards Israel and the Middle East Peace Process remain serious concerns for the United States, the

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<sup>191</sup> George W. Bush, U.S. President, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” September 20, 2001, accessed online at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html> (March 8, 2006).

<sup>192</sup> Sick, “Iran: Confronting Terrorism,” 90-91.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 90.

most alarming issue was Iran's nuclear program. Iran repeatedly claimed that its nuclear program was strictly for peaceful purposes, but the discovery of a clandestine program in late 2002 cast serious doubts. Since this time, Iran has played a cat and mouse game with the IAEA to gain concessions from the three European Union nations, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, commonly referred as the EU-3. In return, Iran agreed to voluntarily suspend its enrichment activities in November 2004, under the provisions spelled out in the Paris Agreement, to allow time for the IAEA evaluate its nuclear program.<sup>194</sup>

The nuclear crisis seriously escalated in 2005 for several reasons. First, Iran said it will not, under any circumstances, give up its nuclear program, a position that Moscow did not seem to mind. Second, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad presidential election in June 2005 signaled an about-face to reform and a return to hard-line politics. Finally, it appeared very unlikely that the United States could garner enough support, especially from Russia, to secure sanctions against Iran in the Security Council, which is essentially a repeat of what happened in January 1980. Unless there is a drastic turn of events, it looks like there is a greater possibility that Iran may get closer to producing a nuclear weapon, which will likely trigger a serious international crisis or, worse yet, a regional war.

#### **E. SUMMARY ANALYSIS**

The relations between the United States and Iran are complicated, and bear much greater consideration than can possibly be covered in the space provided. Both countries went through a lot together and shared a common interest in containing Communism, even during periods of ill will. In looking at the United States' relations with Iran since 1953, it is easy to see that their relations reached both extremes. The governments were once trusted allies, but turned into hated enemies in 2006. What caused this? Using Jervis' approach, it would appear that threat perceptions played an important role in how the leaders of both countries view one another, and hence shaped their policies.

What has the United States and its leaders learned in their relations with Iran over the past fifty-three years? First, Iran holds a strategic position in the Gulf. It was vitally

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<sup>194</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses," *CRS Report for Congress* RL32048, 12-13.

important during the United States' struggle to contain Communism, and is vitally important today due to its energy resources. Although the Communist threat ended, great power politics are still at work as Russia protects its economic interest in Iran. As the two superpowers jockeyed for influence in Iran throughout the Cold War, it now appears that they are at it once again. Only this time, the stakes are much higher due to the Iran's questionable nuclear program. Russia's unwillingness to take any adverse actions against Iran is similar to what happened following the 1979 Revolution, when Russia wanted to be seen as Iran's "friendly" neighbor to the North. It was only after the Tudeh was forced back underground in 1983, due to its subversive activities, that the playing field was leveled the Soviets and the United States. Unlike the United States, the Soviets had learned how important it was to establish good business relations with Iran, which is a pattern of influence that Russia has continued to this day. The United States, on the other hand, has chosen to form its relations with Iran through hostile rhetoric and economic sanctions, neither of which offers any prospect for regaining influence.

Second, the United States learned that Islamic extremism is a serious threat to its security and national interest. The United States experienced its first act of terrorism when Iranian students took over the United States' Embassy and held its occupants hostage. This one act served as a crucial learning experience that has shaped relations ever since. Gary Sick illustrates this point very well by saying,

Well, Iran's behavior overall has caused the whole world to regard it with great suspicion. The hostage crisis [when members of the U.S. embassy in Tehran were seized and held captive for 444 days] was a huge turning point for the United States and I think it left a permanent psychological scar on the United States. A whole generation was brought up with pictures of Iranians in their living room, waving their fists at the camera in front of the American embassy."<sup>195</sup>

Iran's hostility did not stop here. As the Islamic movement secured its domestic power base, it began to export its influence abroad and supported terrorism against both Israel and the United States. Time after time, the United States experienced terrorist attacks – U.S. Marines killed in their Beirut Barracks in 1982 – World Trade Center parking

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<sup>195</sup> Gary G. Sick, "Iran Expert Sick Advocates U.S.-Iran Dialogue on Nuclear Issues, Iraq," *Council on Foreign Relations Interview*, September 22, 2005, accessed online at: [http://www.cfr.org/publication/8894/iran\\_expert\\_sick\\_advocates\\_usiran\\_dialogue\\_on\\_nuclear\\_issues\\_iraq.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/8894/iran_expert_sick_advocates_usiran_dialogue_on_nuclear_issues_iraq.html) (March 21, 2006).

garage bombed in 1993 – U.S. service members killed in the Khobar Towers military complex in 1996 – World Trade Center towers and Pentagon attacked in 2001. While Iran was not directly linked to all of these events, its support of terrorist organizations that were implicated proved to the United States that Iran was supporting a proxy war bent on destroying the American way of life. Even during the moderate years of President Khatami – who openly denounced terrorism and nuclear weapons – Iran’s actions did not change. Simply said, U.S. trust of Iran evaporated following 1979.

Third, the United States learned that its efforts to contain Iran did not stop the Islamic Republic from conducting proxy wars through terrorism beyond its borders. For this reason, U.S. threat perceptions, post September 11, indicate that Iran’s government does not have peaceful intentions and poses an even greater risk to the United States and the free world. President Bush reiterated this point during a press conference, calling Iran a “security threat,” adding that,

The Iranian President has stated his desire to destroy our ally, Israel. So when you start listening to what he has said, to their desire to develop a nuclear weapon, then you begin to see an issue of grave national security concern.<sup>196</sup>

Ultimately, Iran’s hostile rhetoric and behavior have shaped U.S. perceptions to the point it no longer views Iran’s nuclear program, although legal under the NPT, as legitimate. This position, shaped by hostile perceptions, has driven a wedge between the United States and Russia in their positions on nuclear nonproliferation.

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<sup>196</sup> George W. Bush, U.S. President, “President Addresses National Newspaper Association Conference,” March 10, 2006, White House Website, accessed online at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060310-2.html> (March 21, 2006).

## V. U.S. VS. RUSSIA: OPPOSING VIEWS OF PROLIFERATION?

Do Russia and the United States have the same views of nuclear proliferation? Based on the analysis presented in Chapter II, both nations appear to subscribe to Scott Sagan's pessimistic view of proliferation, yet have taken categorically opposing viewpoints on the "peacefulness" of Iran's nuclear program. The United States contends that Iran uses its civilian nuclear program as a cover-up to build an atomic weapon. Russia, on the other hand, does not publicly acknowledge such a view. President Putin indicated, in February 2005, that Russia intended to continue cooperating with Iran's nuclear program.<sup>197</sup> In October, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that "the [Bushehr nuclear power] plant poses no threats to the nuclear non-proliferation regime."<sup>198</sup> Since Russia had already indicated that it did not want Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, these statements indicate that it did not view nuclear cooperation with Iran as a threat. This position placed Russia at loggerheads with the United States. If Russia and the United States agree on the dangers of proliferation, then what explains their opposing views of Iran?

This chapter concludes, based on the findings of chapters 3 and 4, that different threat perceptions explain U.S. and Russian views of Iran's nuclear program, and hence their seemingly opposing views of nuclear proliferation. In order to substantiate this claim further, this chapter builds on the previous chapters to explain how their views of nuclear proliferation have changed over the years. It looks in more detail at the Eisenhower era "Atoms for Peace" program,<sup>199</sup> and Russian and U.S. views of Iran. It further shows how key international events have shaped their threat perceptions of Iran. These include the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the end of the Cold War, and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. This chapter goes on to answer three key questions. First, what importance have the United States and Russia placed on

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<sup>197</sup> Vladimir Putin, Russian President, "Russia to Continue Nuclear Cooperation with Iran," February 18, 2005, accessed online at: [http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/0.html?id\\_issue=10751650](http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/0.html?id_issue=10751650) (February 23, 2005).

<sup>198</sup> Ria Novosti, "Lavrov Sees IAEA Activities in Iran as Only Way to Maintain Non-Proliferation," October 6, 2005, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20051006/41620498.html>, March 13, 2006.

<sup>199</sup> Henry D. Sokolski, *Best of Intentions: America's Campaign Against Strategic Weapons Proliferation* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 30.

the IAEA and NPT as instruments in controlling the spread of nuclear weapons? Second, how have U.S. and Russian threat perceptions of Iran changed over time, and what impact has this had on their willingness to support Iran's nuclear program? Third, do the actions of Russia and the United States provide a clear indication that they share the same positions on nuclear proliferation?

#### **A. VIEWS OF PROLIFERATION**

The United States has been concerned about nuclear proliferation ever since the first atomic explosions on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Unless it could prevent the spread of these deadly weapons, the United States believed that its cities may one day succumb to a similar fate. On August 22, 1949, the Soviet Union tested its first atomic weapon, an event that signified the beginning of both vertical proliferation (increase in a states' number of nuclear weapons) and horizontal proliferation (increase in the number of states possessing nuclear weapons).<sup>200</sup> While both nations recognized the dangers posed by the spread of nuclear weapons, their distrust of one another initially prevented a cooperative effort to curb proliferation.

##### **1. Atoms for Peace**

When President Eisenhower took office in 1953, the United States viewed the Soviet Union as its greatest threat for a nuclear attack. With a sufficient stockpile of nuclear weapons, the Soviets could launch a surprise attack and decisively knock out the United States' ability to counterattack. To moderate the threat posed by vertical proliferation, Eisenhower launched his "Atoms for Peace" program. This program required the superpowers to contribute designated amounts of fissile material to the IAEA to be used to support civilian nuclear programs. This would reduce the amount of fissile material available for weapons production.<sup>201</sup> The problem with Eisenhower's program was that the IAEA could hardly determine whether the fissile material it handed out would be used for peaceful or military purposes; thus, it unintentionally increased the potential for horizontal proliferation. Unlike the United States, the Soviets quickly recognized the potential dangers of this program and were reluctant to agree to such a measure. Henri Sokolski, executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Center,

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<sup>200</sup> Peter A. Clausen, *Nonproliferation and the National Interest: America's Response to the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1991), 22-23.

<sup>201</sup> Sokolski, 28-33.

emphasizes that the Soviet “preoccupation with curbing vertical proliferation continued even after U.S. officials privately briefed the Soviets, who objected to Eisenhower’s proposal on the grounds that the international sharing of nuclear power and technology would increase the world’s ability to make bombs.”<sup>202</sup>

There is a stark contrast between U.S. and Russian views of proliferation today compared to the superpowers’ views of the Atoms for Peace program. At a glance, it appears that the two nations reversed their positions on horizontal nuclear proliferation. During the Cold War, the United States’ initial fear of vertical proliferation, fueled by fears of a Soviet nuclear attack, was subsumed within the broader challenge of horizontal proliferation, especially in the context of Iran. This is witnessed in the United States’ ardent criticism of Russia’s dual-use nuclear exports to and cooperation with Iran.<sup>203</sup> Although under the NPT Russia can legally export dual-use technology to Iran, its predecessor, the Soviet Union, once viewed such actions as a threat. Russia now adamantly defends its right to export such technology to NPT member states, especially Iran. The important point to take away from these examples is that U.S. and Russian views of proliferation are not static, and have changed along with their threat perceptions.

## **2. Russian Perspective**

On February 26, 1989, the Soviet Union and Iran took an unprecedented step towards rapprochement and issued a joint communiqué on the future status of their relations. In particular, the communiqué highlighted that:

The two countries believe that the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean should be changed into a region of peace and stability, free from all weapons of genocide, including nuclear and chemical weapons;...[There would be an] exchange of data on nuclear energy and its peaceful use.”<sup>204</sup>

Reflecting back on Iranian Parliamentary Speaker Rafsanjani’s visit to Moscow in 1989, Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze quoted Gorbachev as saying, “[this will] open a

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<sup>202</sup> Sokolski, 30.

<sup>203</sup> Victor Mizin, “The Russia-Iran Nuclear Connection and U.S. Policy Options,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 8, no. 1 (March 2004), <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2004/issue1/jv8n1a7.html>, (March 12, 2006).

<sup>204</sup> Islamic Republic News Agency [IRNA] on Communiqué, June 25, 1989, in FBIS-NES – 89-121, June 26, 1989, 31, 33.

new chapter in relations between the two countries.”<sup>205</sup> This turning point established the basic element of trust that has sustained the two countries even during the current nuclear showdown at the UN Security Council. Prior to this time, the Soviets did not have a stake in Iran’s nuclear program, conceivably due to Iran’s hostile rhetoric shaped by the Iran-Iraq War and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. As mentioned in Chapter III, the two countries had disagreements over the division of the Caspian Sea and Chechnya, but did not let these situations influence their overall level of economic and nuclear cooperation. Thus, for all practical purposes, Russia’s nuclear cooperation with Iran began in 1989.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991, Russia’s enormous nuclear industrial complex was one of the few industries that survived relatively intact and could be used to generate revenue. Russia recognized the importance of keeping its nuclear scientists gainfully employed in peaceful nuclear enterprises since there was no domestic market for their services, and may have turned a blind eye to some of Minatom’s energy dealings. Although this was an enormous industry, one that was very difficult to keep track of, Russia’s actions indicated that it was concerned about the potential threat of proliferation.<sup>206</sup> In the case of Iran, Russia recognized that Iran was a signatory to the NPT and was legally entitled to receive dual-purpose technology. Iran and Russia were on good terms, they had strong economic ties, and they shared a common interest in countering U.S. expansion in the Gulf. Simply said, Iran’s actions did not pose a threat to Russia and so there was no reason to fear Iran’s motives for nuclear energy.

On August 17, 1992, Russia and Iran signed an agreement called “The Utilization of Nuclear Energy for Peaceful Purposes,” which provided the roadmap for their nuclear cooperation. This agreement was highly criticized by the West, particularly by the Clinton Administration, as a threat to the nonproliferation regime.<sup>207</sup> On January 8, 1995, Russia signed a valuable contract with Iran to rebuild the Bushehr nuclear

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<sup>205</sup> Islamic Republic News Agency [IRNA] on Communiqué, 32.

<sup>206</sup> Celeste A. Wallander, “Russia’s Interest in Trading with the ‘Axis of Evil’,” *PONARS Policy Memo* 248 (October 2002), 4-6.

<sup>207</sup> “Russia, Iran Nuclear Program Cooperation,” *Moscow Nauchnyye Zapiski*, Vol. 8, May 5, 1999, Open Source Center Document ID: FTS19990701001333.



reactor.<sup>208</sup> In response to heightened criticism that Russia was contributing to Iran building a nuclear weapon, Russia responded:

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty exists, Iran is fulfilling it, and has moreover consented to new inspection rules under the 93+2 program. Iran has the right of access to nuclear technologies in this regard. [Furthermore,] [t]he contract with Iran is virtually irreproachable from a legal standpoint. Specialists of Minatom specially studied this issue. Russia in particular ‘did not sign any documents for two years, until Iran reached an agreement with the IAEA on all-encompassing monitoring of all atomic facilities in that country.’ The deal fully meets IAEA requirements, on which the West agreed.<sup>209</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that even though Russia and Iran were on good terms during this time, Russia still took care to minimize the potential for proliferation. On February 28, 2005, Russia signed an agreement to provide nuclear fuel for Iran’s reactors and required spent fuel be returned within ten years. This agreement was signed days after the Putin-Bush Bratislava Summit where, “[t]he two sides publicly agreed that Iran should not be allowed to pursue weapons of mass destruction, but Moscow remained firm in its belief that Iran’s nuclear program was intended for peaceful purposes only.<sup>210</sup>

### **3. U.S. Perspective**

As indicated in Chapter IV, the Shah aggressively sought to make Iran a regional military power in the 1960s and 1970s. He was equally ambitious in his pursuit of nuclear energy. In 1968, Iran signed the NPT and later ratified it in 1970, gaining the legal right to pursue peaceful nuclear technology. In 1974, the Shah created the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and planned to build twenty-three nuclear reactors with the help of the West. The United States, France, and West Germany were all eager to sell the reactors to him.<sup>211</sup> The Shah was a stable, pro-Western dictator who helped to contain Communist expansion. Simply said, the United States did not perceive the Shah and his government as a threat to its security.

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<sup>208</sup> “Russia, Iran Nuclear Program Cooperation.”

<sup>209</sup> Ibid

<sup>210</sup> Nabi Abdullaev, “Russia, Iran Sign Nuclear Fuel Deal,” Nuclear Policy Research Institute, February 28, 2005, <http://www.nuclearpolicy.org/index.cfm?Page=Article&ID=2147>, (March 16, 2006).

<sup>211</sup> Chris Quillen, “Iranian Nuclear Weapons Policy: Past, Present and Possible Future,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6, no. 2, (June 2002), 7.

Although there were conflicting reports about the true nature of the Shah's nuclear program, there were subtle indications that he may have leaned this way. In 1975, the Shah stated that, "if ever a country [of this region] comes out and wants to acquire atomic weapons, Iran must also possess such atomic bombs."<sup>212</sup> With Iraq actively seeking a nuclear program and Israel suspected of having nuclear weapons, his comments appear to indicate that he had similar intentions.<sup>213</sup> Despite such statements, the United States signed contracts in 1974 to build nuclear power plants and to provide nuclear fuel. Subsequent contracts were signed with Germany and France, in 1976 and 1977 respectively.<sup>214</sup> This level of cooperation raises an important question. Did the United States knowingly turn a blind eye to the Shah's nuclear program as it had done over his human rights abuses, simply because it needed Iran's help in containing Communism? After all, the Iranian nuclear program was deemed, in January 1979, "the most advanced in the Middle East."<sup>215</sup>

Iran's nuclear program quickly fell apart after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini froze the nuclear program and cancelled nuclear reactor contracts with the United States and foreign powers worth billions of dollars. In addition, he expelled many Western-educated nuclear scientists from the country and essentially left the program in shambles.<sup>216</sup> Moreover, Iranian students seized the United States Embassy and its occupants and Iran declared the United States to be its enemy. In discussing Iran's current interest in nuclear energy, Jo-Anne Hart states,

the United States perceived Iran's plans for using civilian nuclear power to enhance its economy as legitimate while the Shah controlled the country. Yet, as the Islamic Republic of Iran has attempted to benefit by restructuring its mix of domestic energy sources, it has faced a far different reaction from the United States.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Lewis A. Dunn, *Controlling the Bomb: Nuclear Proliferation in the 1980s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 63.

<sup>213</sup> Quillen, 18.

<sup>214</sup> Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Iran: Nuclear Overview."

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Quillen, 19. See also, Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Iran: Nuclear Overview."

<sup>217</sup> Jo-Anne Hart, "Perceptions and Courses of Actions Toward Iran," *Military Review* English Ed. (September/October 2005), 12, accessed online at: <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC/milreview/download/English/SEPOCT05/hart.pdf>, (March 5, 2006).

Hart's statement emphasizes that perceptions of intent play a significant role in shaping U.S. policies on proliferation. Consequently, these events, along with others mentioned in Chapter IV, shaped the United States' perception that after 1979 Iran was no longer a responsible user of nuclear technology.

#### **4. U.S. and Russian Views of IAEA and NPT**

While representatives from both the United States and Russia serve on the IAEA Board of Governors, they held different perspectives on the institution's value to combat proliferation. The Russians were firmly committed to the principle of the IAEA as the UN's nuclear watchdog agency monitoring NPT compliance. With regard to Iran, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated in October 2005 that, "Russia is interested in the strongest consolidation of the regime of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, above all nuclear weapons, and is convinced that further IAEA activities in Iran will help achieve this goal."<sup>218</sup> As for the NPT, President Putin reiterated Russia's support for it during the 2005 NPT Review Conference where he said, "[it was] an important component of the international security system, which has proven to be efficient, primarily, in the containment of nuclear weapons' spread."<sup>219</sup> Although Russia supported the IAEA, it was reluctant to take an active stand against Iran during many of its meetings. When the IAEA voted in September 2005 on a resolution that found Iran "technically" non-compliant with its safeguards agreement, Russia abstained.

Given Russia's stated opposition to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, this does not seem like a logical decision. However, it does make sense in light of the fact that Russia openly supported Iran's nuclear energy program. This apparent contradiction leads one to accept Jervis' position that "[w]hen statesmen become committed to a given policy, they will feel strong psychological pressures to perceive that the threats they face can be overcome."<sup>220</sup> This further explains the importance that threat perceptions have

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<sup>218</sup> Ria Novosti, "Lavrov Sees IAEA Activities in Iran as Only Way to Maintain Non-Proliferation."

<sup>219</sup> "President Putin Says Russia Views NPT as International Security Component," *Moscow ITAR-TASS* in English, May 3, 2005, Open Source Center Document ID: CEP200503027163.

<sup>220</sup> Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 26.

on a state's policy choices, in particular, Russia's support for Iran's nuclear program. As Jervis notes, "states will be motivated to perceive a threat as smaller or less troublesome than it actually is."<sup>221</sup>

The United States also supported the IAEA and NPT in 2005, but only to the extent that they met its foreign policy objectives. The United States tried to work within the IAEA framework as much as possible, but encountered stiff resistance over its position on Iran, initially from the Europeans, Russia, and China, and then later only from Russia and China. Why? The United States claimed that loopholes in the NPT legitimately allowed nations to circumvent nonproliferation efforts and pursue nuclear weapons. This is what happened with North Korea; it acquired the nuclear know-how and infrastructure to build an atomic weapon and then pulled out of the NPT. As a result, the United States believed that the nonproliferation regime needed to be strengthened. President Bush stated on February 11, 2004, that, "Proliferators must not be allowed to cynically manipulate the NPT to acquire the material and infrastructure necessary for manufacturing illegal weapons."<sup>222</sup> However, President Bush's March 2006 decision to provide nuclear reactors, fuel, and technology to India, an "energy-starved nation," called the President's nonproliferation commitment into question.<sup>223</sup> U.S. behavior was widely criticized as rewarding proliferators and encouraging states to opt out of the nonproliferation regime. Although India was not a signatory of the NPT, it had already covertly acquired nuclear weapons. Further U.S. – Indian nuclear cooperation, without India joining the NPT, weakened the United States' position on Iran.

Threat perceptions provide a likely explanation for the United States' positions on Iran and India. The United States perceived Iran, but not India as a threat. To further support this claim, it was discovered in 2004 that South Korea violated its nonproliferation obligations by conducting clandestine nuclear research and experimentation with uranium enrichment activities from 1979 to 2000. However, Jo-

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<sup>221</sup> Jervis et al., 26.

<sup>222</sup> Cited by John R. Bolton, U.S. Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security, "The NPT: A Crisis of Non-Compliance," Statement to the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2005 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," April 27, 2004, <http://www.state.gov/t/us/rm/31848.htm>, (March 16, 2006).

<sup>223</sup> National Public Radio, "Bush Announces Nuclear Deal with India," *All things Considered* (March 2, 2006), <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5242281>, (March 16, 2006).

Anne Hart states that, “[d]espite the fact that these violations went unreported to the IAEA, no demands to totally abandon their programs have been made.”<sup>224</sup> Why the difference in opinion over South Korea’s and Iran’s nuclear activities? South Korea, unlike Iran, was a long-time ally of the United States and was not perceived as a threat. Robert Jervis suggests that, “The decision maker who thinks that the other side is probably hostile will see ambiguous information confirming this image, whereas the same information about a country thought to be friendly would be taken more benignly.”<sup>225</sup> Jervis’ reasoning explains the contradictory U.S. positions on India, South Korea, and Iran. The United States had remained highly critical of Iran, a country it had problems with since 1979, yet looked more “benignly” at India and South Korea. The contradiction in U.S. and Russian policies indicates that threat perceptions have played an extremely important role with respect to views of nuclear nonproliferation.

## **B. EVENT-DRIVEN VIEWS OF PROLIFERATION**

Chapter II posed three questions based on Jervis’ psychological theory of decision-making: 1) Do perceptions matter? 2) Where do perceptions come from? 3) What impact do perceptions have on decision-makers? The information presented so far indicates that perceptions do matter and have shaped both Russia’s and the United States’ positions on nuclear nonproliferation. It is now important to highlight the role that key events had in shaping U.S. and Russian threat perceptions of proliferation, in order to explain where these perceptions came from.

### **1. The Islamic Revolution of 1979**

Prior to 1979, Iran played a central role in helping the United States contain the expansion of Communism. As a regional ally, the Shah had been commissioned under the Nixon Doctrine to protect U.S. interest in the Gulf and had access to virtually every U.S. made weapon to carry out this task. Actual and potential economic ties that the United States had with Iran were staggering. With little warning, the Islamic Revolution turned this watershed of security and prosperity upside down. The student-led takeover of the United States Embassy became the first act of terrorism, imprinting an image on the minds of Americans who lived through this era. Jervis expects such dramatic events

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<sup>224</sup> Hart, 11.

<sup>225</sup> Jervis, Lebow, and Stein, *Perceiving and Coping with Threat*, 18.

to play a key role in shaping which threats decision-makers' will perceive.<sup>226</sup> Looking back on the events of 1979, Jo-Anne Hart noted the ongoing importance of the hostage crisis for U.S. perceptions:

That the hostage-crisis period remains manifest in the American emotional perception of Iran after a quarter of a century was quickly revealed recently when some of the former hostages mistakenly identified the newly elected Iranian president as one of their captors.<sup>227</sup>

U.S. concerns were not limited to Iran's domestic actions. Khomeini further caused alarm by indicating his intention to export the revolution out of Iran. As acts of terrorism linked to Iran increased, it seemed obvious to U.S. decision-makers that Iran was an exporter of Islamic extremism and threatened any chances for Middle East peace. The Soviets welcomed the Revolution since it ended a period of American dominance in the Gulf. This was true even though Communism and Islam were ideologically opposed to one another, except for their anti-American stance, and despite Khomeini labeling of the Soviet Union as the second great Satan. Without experiencing first-hand the effects of Iran's revolution, Soviet decision-makers were less predisposed than their American counterparts to perceive Iran as a threat.

## **2. End of the Cold War**

When the Cold War ended in December 1991, it ushered in what many hoped would be a new era of multilateralism. While the spread of Communism no longer posed a threat to the United States, the break-up of the Soviet Union presented an even greater challenge due to the increased potential for nuclear warheads or nuclear material to get into the hands of terrorists and states. The Cold War's end effectively brought the two sides together in their desire to curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Both countries cooperated to secure the movement of Soviet nuclear weapons from the former Soviet republics of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. Preventing nuclear proliferation was a top priority for the first Bush and Clinton Administrations. The United States Congress passed the Soviet Nuclear Threat Reduction Act in 1991 to help counter the threat posed

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<sup>226</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 239-240.

<sup>227</sup> Hart, 9.

by loose nuclear warheads and material.<sup>228</sup> It provided billions of dollars in U.S. financial backing for the Russians to secure their facilities and keep their nuclear scientists gainfully employed. While the end of the Cold War challenged U.S. efforts to contain nuclear proliferation from within Russia, it also presented economic opportunities for the Russians to put their nuclear science on the market to willing customers – like Iran – that were deemed responsible, NPT abiding states.

### **3. September 11, 2001**

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon provided a wake-up call to the United States and the Russians as to the lengths terrorists will go to engage in mass murder and destruction. Alexei Arbatov captures how U.S. and Russian threat perceptions of nuclear proliferation changed in the following statement:

The horrible tragedies in New York and Washington on the morning of September 11, 2001, showed to the whole world a glimpse of the worst-possible proliferation scenario, in which nuclear weapons would fall into the hands of international terrorists who would use them to plunge the entire civilized world into shock and chaos. It seems unquestionable that further WMD proliferation and the danger of its merger with international terrorism (so called super terrorism or catastrophic terrorism) will continue to be a priority issue in Russian-U.S. relations, as well as in the cooperative efforts of the nuclear powers and nuclear suppliers, in UN activities, and in the practice of using force in international policies.<sup>229</sup>

The events of September 11, 2001 shaped U.S. threat perceptions regarding nuclear proliferation. Fears of nuclear proliferation prompted a new security doctrine of preemption, first used against Iraq for failing to satisfy U.S. concerns regarding its weapons of mass destruction programs. However, it is not clear that 9/11 had the impact on Russian decision-makers that Arbatov hoped for. Putin focused on the threat of terrorism, and evidenced less concern regarding proliferation of nuclear weapons to states. Such concerns were reinforced by the 1995 memory that Chechen rebels placed a radiological device in a Moscow park. For Russians decision-makers, 9/11 merely reinforced the threat they perceived – not from states – but from non-state actors.

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<sup>228</sup> Defense Threat Reduction Agency, “Threat Reduction History,” <http://www.dtra.mil/toolbox/directorates/ctr/history.cfm>, (March 17, 2006).

<sup>229</sup> Alexei Arbatov, “Horizontal Proliferation: New Challenges,” *Russia in Global Affairs* 2, no. 2 (April-June 2004): 148.

## C. CONCLUSION

World events have changed the threat perceptions of Russia and the United States. Both countries are united in their desire to prevent proliferation in general, but their approaches to preventing nuclear proliferation to Iran were totally opposite and suggest that commitment to nonproliferation exists only when the would-be nuclear state is perceived to be a threat. Russia is on friendly terms with Iran and has no reason to doubt Iran's stated peaceful intentions. This is important to recognize since, due to its geographic proximity, Russia theoretically has a lot to fear from a nuclear-armed Iran. Celeste Wallander puts it another way: "although proliferation is a potential security threat, the Russian leadership and foreign policy elite do not see Russia as a likely target of the countries or non-state actors most likely to obtain WMD capability."<sup>230</sup> Such equanimity was quite possibly due to Russia's willingness to seek diplomatic solutions to problems, as well as its economic interests, compared to the United States' confrontational approach towards Iran. On the other hand, the United States had a lot to fear from a nuclear-armed Iran, given their poisoned relations since 1979. Their lack of formal diplomatic relations prevented meaningful dialogue that might alleviate tensions. This need for such dialogue was one key lesson that the Soviets and Americans learned during the Cold War.

Do Russia and the United States view nuclear proliferation in the same light? The theoretical framework, as laid out in Chapter II, suggests that Russia and the United States are nuclear pessimists. However, the evidence presented does not fully substantiate this claim. The leaders of both countries have stated views that indicate they subscribe to Scott Sagan's nuclear pessimism argument, yet Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran seemingly contradicts this position. So, what explains this apparent difference? Simply said, it is fear. Russia has indicated that it considers the threat of nuclear proliferation to states to be less dire than does the United States.<sup>231</sup> In the case of Iran, Russia's friendly relations with the Islamic Republic decreased its concerns over nuclear

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<sup>230</sup> Celeste A. Wallander, "Geopolitics and Neo-Containment, as Well as Common Security: Russian Views on Proliferation," *PONARS Policy Memo no. 371*, (December 2005), 24.

<sup>231</sup> Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Nuclear Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Environment," *Proliferation Papers* (Autumn 2005), 27-28, accessed online at: [http://www.ifri.org/files/Securite\\_defense/prolif\\_12\\_Trenin.pdf](http://www.ifri.org/files/Securite_defense/prolif_12_Trenin.pdf) (March 21, 2006).



cooperation. This is a stark contrast to the fears expressed by the United States about Iran. During a trip to Afghanistan on March 1, 2006, President Bush declared:

Iran must not have a nuclear weapon. The most destabilizing thing that can happen in this region and in the world is for Iran to have a -- develop a nuclear weapon. And so the world is speaking with one voice to the Iranians that it's okay for you to have a civilian power -- nuclear power operation, but you shall not have the means, the knowledge to develop a nuclear weapon.<sup>232</sup>

Both Russia and the United States are concerned about the spread of nuclear weapons, but their approaches to curbing proliferation are tied to their threat perceptions. If a country is deemed an acceptable risk or a responsible user of nuclear technology, then they are likely to cooperate. The problem is when they do not agree on who is considered an acceptable risk, as is the case with Iran. This truly creates a problem for the nonproliferation regime. Without a clear consensus and commitment from its members to universally curb proliferation efforts, the IAEA and NPT are doomed to failure. This raises an important question: Will Russia and the United States continue to work together in this regard? According to Dmitri Trenin,

Russia will remain firmly committed to nuclear non-proliferation, above all through improvement of its own safety and security procedures and export controls. At the same time, Russia will resist what it regards as disingenuous U.S. attempts to make it withdraw from nuclear energy cooperation with countries like Iran.<sup>233</sup>

Fear explains the two former Cold War adversaries' views of Iran's nuclear program. This suggests that the nuclear pessimism – nuclear optimism argument is fundamentally dependent on threat perceptions – and threat perceptions are likely to shape the future success of the nonproliferation regime.

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<sup>232</sup> George W. Bush, U.S. President, "President Meets with President Hamid Karzai in Kabul, Afghanistan," March 1, 2006, White House news accessed online at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060301.html> (March 21, 2006).

<sup>233</sup> Trenin, 28.

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